

THANK YOU, AMERICA!

*First published in "Wind in the Night Sky"
(Maryland: The National Library of Poetry, 1993)*

Thank you, America! for rescuing us from hell,
Humble humans deprived of all rights to life.
In our old country our enemies cruelly quell
Laborers, intellectuals, revolutionaries, monks alike.

Thank you, America! for teaching us systematism
By which military is only a part of attribution.
In our late republic existed militarism
Causing dictatorship to erode the constitution.

Thank you, America! for the example to settle
The difference between politics and religion.
In our poor nation the priests did meddle
In worldly powers, and it was mutual demolition.

Thank you, America! for granting us medium
To develop our bodies and expand our minds.
In our left-behind state there is no freedom
To work and enjoy, think and express any kinds.

Thank you, America! for nursing us deep hope
For a near future we can True Virtue attain
So that our Motherland emerge on the globe,
Our People, with your help, Man's Value regain.

THANH-THANH

I HAVE LEFT BEHIND

*First published in "Best New Poems"
(Washington, DC: The Poets Guild, 1994)*

I have left my children to save my own hide
While I could not have prepared them for life
With their kids nobody knows what would betide
To their future and towards which how to strive.

I have left my property that from sweat flowed,
But the thugs appropriated and refused to return.
They claimed over my body, the debt never-owed
And the sharp practices they forced me to learn.

I have left my poor people unfortunate and unable,
Wiped out of intelligence and wise scrutinies,
In a war-torn country which the traitors disable,
Squandering resources and missing opportunities.

I have left behind my past but not for it to pass
Because I never forget or deny its persistence.
To head for a better tomorrow I have to amass
All experiences that are part of my existence.

I have left them for this Land of Promises full
And advantageous for my dreams to come true,
Not only to free myself, out of misery to pull,
But also to claim for my compatriots their due.

THANH-THANH

I F

*First published in "Best Poems of the '90s"
(Maryland: The National Library of Poetry, 1996)*

If he won her heart, he would brag
That those who courted her he rose above;
Being in glory, he surely would never nag
At having allegedly misplaced his love!

If she succeeded in knowledge and talents,
She would find pride of a dignified human,
Between sterner and weaker no imbalance
Worth complaining of being a woman!

If you have been living a truly pious life,
You would end being saved by the Savior;
About those not surviving disasters' strike,
You would assert they paid for ill behavior!

If they determined a Just Cause to pursue,
They would sacrifice their lives so dear;
And anti-war movements would peace renew
But not casualties try to dodge, out of fear!

If the United States won the Vietnam battle,
It would embellish its history right along
And not be a victim for McNamara* to rattle
In his retrospect, “We were terribly wrong!”

THANH-THANH

**McNamara: former Defense Secretary of the USA*

JUST CAUSE

First published in "Poem Hunter"
(<http://www.poemhunter.com/> USA, 1992)

You asked me to tell about my native land,
And you made as if you did all understand;
But, I was aware you gave to it no priority,
Except to amuse yourself with your curiosity.

Would it be too demanding if I asked back
Your opinion on the war that became a crack
As the longest and most controversial conflict
To bedevil and cause people to contradict?

Do not mention the fifty-eight-thousand lost,
One-hundred-and-eighty-billion dollars cost,
And the way it happened in that painful past,
Its social and mental syndrome thence to last.

Just tell me what you feel, think, and react
When they claimed lack of Just Cause a fact
While National Security and Interests' scope
Is asserted to include anywhere on the globe!

Why not to let Europe for the Nazis to take,
And Asia for the Mikado militarists to invade,
And West Germany for the Soviets to fool,
And South Korea for the Red Chinese to rule?

Of course, the States had to pay some prices
To win and gain the biggest and best slices!
Thus, they had recourse to "No Just Cause!"
Only because they came to a defamed pause!

Wait and see! I bet, it will be taking actions
To intervene for and against certain factions.
The Middle East, Africa... the cons and pros:
No more "Far! Strange! Misjudging the foes!"

Now, you have got it: It is remedying things!
Iron fists? velvet gloves? just tactical swings!
The Free World must win to redeem its pride
And justify that the Just Cause is on our side!

THANH-THANH

OWING TO EVE

*First published in "Our 100 Most Famous Poets"
(Oregon: Famous Poets Society, 2004)*

Of what is good and of what is bad,
The human race owes this knowledge to Eve.
By getting herself and Adam in fig leaves clad,
She was the first human Wisdom to conceive.

Alas! after that they were into a dilemma put
Between conservative hold and radical edification.
The libertine wanted to reject mythical root
And the ascetic to stand by absurd predestination.

That is why even Noah's descendants
Rebelled against God, building the Babel tower,
While the self-claimed Creator's dependants,
Inquisitors, persecuted people to impose power.

We, today, have found no waters above the dome
(But many suns, the Big Bang, the Black Hole)!
Much older than six thousand years: Man's home!
Organ implants, test tube babies: non-God's role!

Determined not to use Wisdom to sham,
Humankind is to improve and perfect human life.
One should no longer remain as meek as a lamb
But follow Eve who has ventured that first stride.

THANH-THANH

REFLECTIONS

*First published in "Best Poems of 1997"
(Maryland: The National Library of Poetry, 1997)*

I have heard palaver, over historic issues ranged,
Such as, "If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter,
The whole face of the world would have changed!"
But who asked "How?" would be a blabber aborter!

I have heard of legitimate possessions justification
Quoting, "Render unto Caesar the Caesar's things!"
But people are unaware of such self-devastation,
For Jesus added, "Unto God the Heavenly King's"!

I have heard the priests against incest preach;
But they can absolve repentant believers from any sin!
Well, how could be born of Adam's descendants each
If Cain had not had intercourse with his own kin?

I have experienced the Marxist-Maoist illogicality;
They force you to accept and believe their beliefs:
A classless society but for the proletariat partiality
And a stateless world but under communist chiefs!

So, I do acclaim and support any good success
And do further accept theoretically good intentions
But never extol and thank what is utopian guess:
Man at these times only needs realistic inventions!

THANH-THANH

LAUD TO POPE JOHN PAUL II

On 03-12-2000, Pope John Paul II apologized for all
the Vatican's sins in the past.

*First published in "Who's Who in New Poets"
(New York: Who's Who in New Poets, 1996).*

I laud you for most of the other moral systems detecting
And for anything true and holy in them not rejecting –
Those Asian Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist religions,
And Australian hundreds-of-centuries-old native
traditions.

I commend you for admitting your predecessors
misapprehended
The earth's form and position for which Galileo
contended.
To deny the roundness and movement of the globe, in
error
The Inquisition persecuted the physicist, inflicted terror!

I praise you for acknowledging that, without lenience,
In order to liberate Jerusalem from Islamic obedience,
They fostered crusades in the European Catholics' name,
But they had recourse to violence – unworthy of fame!

I respect you for apologizing, to many a Latin nation,
For Spanish past roles in South-America
Evangelization.
Delegated by the Church, Spain took advantage of the
situation
To practice cruelly massacre, tyranny, and exploitation!

I admire you for testifying your anterior ones' lack of
sanity
While love of one another is the Bible's thesis of
humanity.
They considered the black-skinned as of lowest grade;
And they tolerated, and even encouraged, slave trade!
I sympathize with your feeling about World War II a
sharp pain:
The Vatican's cooperation with the Nazis—a dark stain!
I acclaim your recognition of the processes of
Evolution:
Such reasoning beyond Creation is quite a revolution!
I extol you rectifying the doctrine of the Virgin Mary:
Whether body and soul into heavenly glory it does vary.
To inherit sin – before that conception – she was bound;
To exclude her from natural death, there is no ground.

I thank you for teaching Christians to repent of their sin
Committed in the past by certain Pontiffs and their kin.
Such lucidity, justice, and courage, of a man capable,
Lets me believe that you, the Pope, is not mistakable!

THANH-THANH

**The Pope made his first visit to Poland his native country in 1979. Thanh-Thanh, as Nhuan Xuan Le, the Republic of Viet-Nam's CIA-supported high-ranking intelligence official, had already started his activities against the Polish (and Hungarian) communists since 1973-1975, succeeding in recruiting many Polish (and Hungarian) members of the ICCS (International Commission of Control and Supervision) to work for the CIA within their communist parties, governments and armed forces, facilitating the democratization operations afterwards.*

THE YEAR 2000

*First published in "Outstanding Poets of 1994"
(Maryland: National Library of Poetry, 1994)*

After the year two thousand, I will be still alive,
And so will other animals and worms.
There still will be vegetables and germs,
And mundane life as ever, rain or shine.

Not the earth to stop revolving will tend,
Neither the seas to dry, nor the air to condense;
Each day will be a new one, not the last hence;
And the world – humanity – will face no end.

Wars will continue to erupt here and there
As an ordeal to test Man's thirst for Peace.
Poverty, ignorance, and diseases will not cease
For egoism, greed, and cruelty will not care.

But, anywhere on the globe, in any event,
There always will be conscience, common sense.
The elites still will vow the innocent's defense,
For people to be safe, prosperous, and content.

We still will have much more progress to make
And many more stars to explore and win.
To prepare for the twenty-first century to begin,
We need self-reliance striving for our own sake.

THANH-THANH

THE “HIJACKER”

*In remembrance of September 4, 1992
Lý Tông parachuting down to Saigon, Vietnam.*

Have you ever heard, read or thought about hijackers
Who elude punishment or persecution in the place
left behind?
They force unexpected landings against pilots and
passengers,
In the newly chosen destination, pardon or safety to
find.

Pirates, plunderers, smugglers, kidnappers or
murderers
Would escape to the third world, as neutral zones to
hide;
Or terrorists, saboteurs, rioters, traitors, and deserters
Would retreat to their comrades' den on the opposite
side.

The Unites States succeeded in persuading the Soviet
Union
To compromise to prosecute and sentence those that
deserve.
Then the international community began to act in
unison
Against hijacking, travelers to protect, and travels to
preserve.

THANH-THANH

THE RIGHT TO VOTE

*The author, Nhuan Xuan Le, became
a US citizen on July 16, 1997*

I hold my ballot in my shaking hand
And say to myself: this is cause and effect.
The opportunity is so grand
I have spent all my life to expect.

You have lived in a free country,
Here you and your ancestors were born;
Your civil rights are numerous and sundry;
Please do feel pity for the forlorn.

I had exercised my right to vote
In my native land's first ever election:
Illiterates did not know what cadres wrote;
Bad factions led them to wrong direction.

Wanting self-rule, people grew wiser;
The patriots just built a young nation.
But the invaders, however, were slyer:
Elections were only to shield usurpation.

That is why I came to this world;
To become a proud citizen I strived.
Liberty in the starred banner unfurled;
Human rights by none to be deprived.

I cast my vote for the candidates I trust;
I opt for the propositions I approve;
No choices imposed by others as a must,
No revenge on the dissidents as a move.

It is the result of my struggle in the past
To resist despotism and exact democracy.
It is the stimulus to advancement here fast
To expand regardless of geography.

Though somebody dislikes time wasted,
Why not to use the right to go to the polls?
This is for me Freedom so long awaited,
Let me, the baby, enjoy my favorite dolls.

THANH-THANH

ANGELS

*First published in "Best Poems of 1995"
(Maryland: National Library of Poetry, 1995)*

If angels are sinless, so as much are babies.
How unjust to hold one liable for ancestral sin?
Angel is substance's nature, sin attribute's rabies
Sinners impregnate the character of growing kin.

When a child, each of my children knew no ruses;
And at present any of my grandchildren is so sincere.
I embraced the innocent like I had kissed the muses:
That's the way I and the like mean young kids to rear.

However, since I entered this radical society new,
I've missed so-called immune angels: what a woe!
I have run into lots of an infant, to be cherished due,
But instilled with sickly biases, a latent fiendish foe!

How many times I have encountered an inviting smile,
Those babies, but dared not look at, much less stroke.
To prevent potential alleged victims from alleged guile,
Much pain is inflicted on the heart of the decent folk!

THANH-THANH

FAMILIAR

*Original “Quen Thuộc”
by THANH-THANH (Nhuan Xuan Le)*

There are paths and persons known to each other
Since the couple began to date one another.
Her hair flowing over his shoulder used to rejoice;
And how sweet did sound the sweetheart's voice !

Unexpected chats though without themes were bright
And thus continued endlessly night after night.
The gates usually were not shut at that section:
Unchained dogs followed us, barking to no objection.

Covering her sight from the dazzle with a small hand,
There was a school-girl with homework gone bland;
Innermost stirred in her virginal soul of a gal,
She seemed to dream a moment of some future pal.

*

Here tonite to this old path familiar since long ago
We are coming back to revive our youth glow.
Husband and wife at dogs barking and running after
Look at one another, convulsed with laughter.

Were our love in those green days let to disappear,
How could we have our easy mind in this nite sphere:
We walk on the old path of familiarity permanent
And embrace in our four arms the wide firmament...

English version by THANH-THANH

GIRLFRIEND

*Original “Bạn Gái”
by THANH-THANH*

Since then I have undergone a thinking innovation
That both female and male take the same orientation.
To appreciate your feelings, emotional and carnal
blend,
I’ve got to meet your needs to be worth your boyfriend.

Since then I have been using belts of quality brands
To prevent disappointment when you’re taking off my
pants.
Under smart clothes, I have worn smooth, sleek briefs
To satisfy your sights, excite your desire to rise to
peaks.

Since then I have cared to wash more often all right
To prepare sweet taste for waves and winds to gain
height.
Juicy fruit, luscious stamen pure and clean in summer
sun
Is the yeast of love past tongue, through throat to run.

Since then I've done gymnastics, diligently exercising,
On-arms, on-knees, self-supporting, legs-bending
applying.

To reach climax in intercourse you need staying power
Not only flex muscles, but strain nerves above all to
tower.

Since then I have taken various nutritious foods, tonics
To be able to enjoy pleasures having in potency frolics.
For giving and receiving must be durable with much
clout,
You cannot be worn-out, and weak, or half-in half-out.

Since then I have played the so-called independent role
In disregard of surroundings, just only to get you whole.
Characteristic habits have become customary affections:
Beyond the age of eighteen is beyond parents'
objections.

*

But, as your boyfriend, I haven't had assured rests and
kips:
To hitch up your skirts is simple as to re-define your lips.
The prospects of family are so dimmed in the value field
As ethic is made light of, only just for carnal desire to
yield.

English version by THANH-THANH

THE TWO WOMEN

Women here worked. Your Mom did too.
To her husband her livelihood was not due.
Each time she felt too satiated she got a divorce
In spite of lonesome children, without remorse.

Women there did not work, so didn't my Mom.
She depended on her husband everything from.
Any time he felt dissatisfied he took a new wife
In disregard of her and the kids' helpless life.

The kids, you and I, didn't have a nearby Dad.
The male parent's absence caused us to be sad.
And our Moms had to find each another mate;
The fake fathers only made us dislike or hate.

And the mothers had new kids with new men;
And we had half-brothers and half-sisters then,
Step-brothers and step-sisters, not to mention:
With not flesh-and-blood sank in contention.

The privations we had to suffer in our infancy
And the grief we got was mental stringency.
Children grew up with that legacy they bore.
The tragedy repeated as it used to be before.

Well, it is now time for us to put on our cloaks
Supposedly to play the roles of our old folks.
But, with science, technology, soar like kites:
Sex revolution, women rights, children rights.

Pregnant teenagers, juvenile single mothers,
Fatherless babies, HIV and AIDS, and others.
To think of the same plight for our own kids
What choices should we try to make our bids?

Western civilization is so absorbing a sphere:
The gals there have followed the girls here.
You would instinctively take part in such evil
Regardless of any social or moral retrieval.

I advocate those who appeal to ethical values,
Who have lived their lives in the due avenues,
And young ladies with abstinence pledge fresh:
Independent from the flirts and from the flesh.

THANH-THANH

NO, THANK YOU!

No, thank you, darling! But, I love you.
To overstep Pure Love, I do not do.
For both of us the utmost end to gain,
From ephemeral pleasure I must abstain.

Let us be consistent, encourage each other,
For now and later on, value to recover.
Together with law and public opinion,
Conscience is the miraculous dominion.

(If ever you gave up your keen wager,
Lead loose a life like many a teenager,
To become a single mother: well, that's it!
Gone with the wind, fairy dreams to quit!

But, the minor-fathered generations new
Inheriting the immature dads' low IQ ,
When each grown into a parent, a national
How could compete for a life rational?)

We will entrust each other body and soul
On a bridal night officially as a whole.
True Love deserves being kept sublime,
And Virtue preserved for our lifetime.

THANH-THANH

THE CREATOR

There still are many a thing
Science has not found the source.
Spirits: fairies? fiends? who's the "King"
To solely decide all life's course?

When one feels distress and despair
Caused by failure, defeat and loss,
Being too absurd, senseless and unfair,
One would reproach that unjust "Boss".

And when one finds things sublime
Already made ready by Mother Nature,
One would imagine in prime time
A supreme power as the "Creator".

Well, I would believe in “God”,
Not the Disputed, but the True,
For “He” now is really odd
Just because of mere humans’ view.

It might be “God” inspired Man,
But only through some pious believers
With vague knowledge within a span,
To reveal Truth, with some levers.

Those upstarts added their own ideas,
Claimed their guesses to be divine.
They made themselves forever seers,
Forbade new prophets to dare interline.

That is why disagreement has arisen
Among his church and her congregation.
The Bible included details ill given
Life has proved to be fabrication.

Man’s existence is six-thousand-year?
Only Moses’ lineage chosen to survive?
Who tempts lions to devour deer?
Satan still rules despite Jesus’ life?

All religions teach: humans be humane!
Why not accept all good teachers?
Why monopolize throne for exclusive reign?
Why tolerate, reward, not punish “breachers”?

Gautama let disciples trust or doubt;
Confucius and Lao-Tzu kept mutual respect.
Only the unsteady fear being out;
True, Good, Beautiful always take effect.

Religion is grooves but not moves;
Peace and Humanity is to enhance.
Better care about how Man improves
Than blindly depend on mythical chance.

THANH-THANH

MY QUEST

You asked me, “Whom are you looking for
While plenty are ready within your door?”
– Oh, even the most insatiable dictator
For whom the whole world is forced to cater
Having the power to people’s lives sacrifice
Can hardly find a shadow of paradise!

You asked me, “What are you searching for
Since everything is available to you in store?”
– Oh, my hands with five fingers each
Only hold a small quantity they can reach
But when unfolded have nothing to remain!
How to grasp mysteries in Heaven’s domain?

– Now, my sweetheart, could you realize?
I do not quest for my nature with my eyes!
As a color without a hue, tone without value,
A mute noise, silent voice, invisible statue,
I have been after you all over since the prime,
I have been seeking my true Self, all lifetime!

THANH-THANH

THIS HALF OF MINE

*Original “Một Nửa”
by ANH ĐỘ (Đỗ Cẩm Khê)*

My flesh is composed of two halves; no laugh!
One is the very mine, the other my better half.
Each whole day is half morning, half afternoon.
In love she would half yes tune, half no croon.
As the evening clouds are half violet, half rose,
Her feelings half cold, in a daze my heart to pose,
Have caused me to half wait, half long for, foolish,
Half staying disconsolate, half straying, coolish,
Half infatuated bitterly; but I do not care, sure!
Half of myself, too, would not bemoan this amour.

Translation by THANH-THANH

ANGUISH

*Original “Ê Chề”**by ANH ĐỘ (Đỗ Trang Anh Độ)*

I have lived many years away from my old country
And resigned myself to becoming amongst the rabble
Never yet thought of the duty though of all and sundry
To achieve any responsibility even just to dabble.

Neither welcome, send-offs, nor greetings at least
Have I received through Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter
But seen the neighbors' indifference West and East
And heaven-and-earth' vastness out of mine the inner.

When I decided to leave my native place, I did aspire
To return some day to gloriously liberate the land;
But real life, alas, has shattered all my deep desire,
All that I had dreamt of every night to my demand.

I have lived here in exile a kind of self-denial life
Letting time pass in a gone-with-the-wind fashion
In order that there is no distinction of our life-style:
The sight of others at work arouses my compassion.

Many a night I get wrapped up in reading books,
Short stories, novels, even trifles; but they do nerve,
And I feel under a spell because of beauty and looks,
And I seek for inspiration to create my own verse.

I wake up to see in the morning my hair snow-white,
In the evening my shoulders scraggy, cheeks sinking,
Anguish overwhelming heart, tears dimming eyesight.
Some pagoda bell somewhere around here is ringing.

Translation by THANH-THANH

A MELODY

*Original “Giai Diệu”
by CAO MỸ NHÂN*

It was always you with your air pensively deep,
Your stride with hesitation on the hill steep,
Your image glimmering through cigarette smoke,
Night after night pity for my heart to evoke;
Always you and myself sitting one another by
And watching the shooting stars in the high sky.

It was always you, honey, with that bright smile
And myself till the war-end waiting all the while.

Let me bring you into our dear wonders' land
For you forever to sing songs of sweet brand
Lulling me into my long nostalgic night-time:
Beside tired weapons thousands of a love rhyme.

Translation by THANH-THANH

PHUONG...

*Original “Phượng”
by CHINH NGUYỄN*

Phuong is still in me like in my dreaming years.
He that loves, his beauty how he heartily spheres!
That flamboyant-colored dress now dust blurs,
In the old school-yard my tearful memory recurs.

I asked... when you left... why the sun fell in dole,
Your shadow died on the porch, I cried in my soul.
Each step you got farther, farther to what clime?
You killed my love, the love of all my lifetime.

Summer comes back, flamboyant flowers display
Like blood in my heart dropping on the return way.
Oh, whose figure, as firecracker rubbish to daze;
Ruined, I silently drag my feet unaware in a maze.

I thought that the old dream had forever vanished
As a free bird drifting to some horizon unwished,
But all of a sudden... your image... I visualize...
Listless, my youth has faded pitifully to actualize.

Well, even summer is back, I do not await you,
Tho old shore still pines for former boat, so blue!
I am at the top of the street, you end of the river;
Sea divides, waves crash, to hurt this loyal liver.

Translation by THANH-THANH

NOSTALGIC AUTUMN

Original "Thu Nhớ"
by CHÚC ANH

Although we are away from each other,
You, the scent of the past, I still adore.
I have been pining, every minute awaiting
Your return to satisfy my longing for.

I have hung around in the warm sun:
Our souls with the wind and clouds blend
Hovering under the familiar heavens
Where our delight used to extend.

When came the evening, the two lovers
Whispered each in the other's ear
In a quiet corner of the autumn lake
Vowing lifelong love in it to persevere.

Now that you are very far away
I still preserve the old petal, the feel
Of the rare fragrant flower half-opened
On the forest fringe full of appeal
In the cold poetic moonlit mid-autumn...
Such nostalgia, how to sufficiently reveal!

Translation by THANH-THANH

UNALLAYABLE LONGING

*Original “Khôn Ngươi Niềm Nhớ”
by CUNG ĐIỂM*

I have not returned to Trung Phuoc to revisit
My native land, for almost forty years since I left it
To get tired of exploring various places that enthrall
But with so many failures and not less rise and fall.

How lovable is the rough and sinuous village way,
Green bamboo hedges, pigeons cooing at midday!
The jackfruits' smell portends they are ripe soon,
Crows call, summer noon hammocks hum croon.

The band of grey clouds covers Ca Tang Mountain
To have a bumper crop of Ba Trang rice brings rain.
The paddy fragrance nurtures love of native soil nice,
Bamboo trees wither, showers urge sprouts to rise.

North-easterly wind blows Winter door chink thru,
Kitchens exhale the smell of popcorn tasty to chew.
Huddled, looking out of the window-frame tight
Rain and rain... people crave for a bit of sunlight.

How I long for my motherland myriad miles away
With the lofty Ca Tang Mountain imposing display,
The quiet Thu Bon River's flow provides for tillage,
Half a day by ferry-boat to reach my Mom's village.

I still delay my promise to get back to those of old,
Fearing not to see my concurrent generation of fold.
Here I use bitter alcohol over nostalgia to mourn
While back home my peers lump it feeling forlorn.

Translation by THANH-THANH

ONCE UPON A TIME

*Original “Ngày Xưa”
by DIỄM THY*

Once upon a time, there was one in violet clad
To continue inspiring my poetic dreams so sad.

Until times later on, Cupid would never deign!
He is so sparing in grace for me to await in vain.

Clouds to drift, lovers to part, life is like to make;
I have experienced many a turn my heart to ache.

Sadness chokes me with compassion and stays!
Oh darling, how I miss the violet in by-gone days!

Translation by THANH-THANH

TRUTH

*Original “Chân Lý”
by DIỄN NGHỊ*

On that old day – How could it be neglected?
The scientist Bruno went on to the pyre
As if he was taking a stroll, unaffected;
He re-affirmed to the frenzied abusers of fire:
“The Earth is round, in that Truth I trust
Although my body has to turn into dust!”

The fanatics determined the earth was square
As from their gods and saints they had learned;
Whoever came to the contrary say to dare
Was consequently ordered to be alive burned!

Man’s intellect develops as life evolves;
The most revered halo he has come to gain:
By flying to the moon he now firmly resolves
The roundness of our Earth like a ball to reign
In the azure universe forever to remain.

Even the 20th century has ended its dominion,
There still are the furious with their choler,
To put labels on others for a different opinion;
Promote hatred; spread misfortune and dolor!

And the idiots about literature to talk hot air;
The fool, insane to fluctuate history's fate;
The ignorant to dream of a leader's chair;
All to sully and drown the pillars of the State!

Bruno's Truth is the very Truth of the Sage,
The Sparkle of Fire, the Pride of Pure Fame,
Whereas today's vulgar people disparage,
Misrepresent the Bad as Good – What shame!

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE DAY THAT WENT DOWN LATE

*Original “Một Ngày Xuống Muộn”
by DIỄN NGHỊ*

At this turning point, “Hey, butterflies!” asked I
(Busy playing with flowers they ignored me thereby),
Then, “Virgin forest!” (It kept silent). And I passed
In the mountain wind which was whizzing that fast.

I looked at the poor trunks of old trees fallen to rot,
Felt compassion for things in decay like my own lot.
I raised my voice to call out humans (if there to be),
The birds and beasts made haste to flee from me.

The immense jungle to a standstill seemed eased;
I went astray for my inmost feelings to be appeased.
The inanimate spring sank deep into a quiet sleep;
The wild coolish orchid of nature stayed to creep.

“Wait, oh twilight!” in my heart choked my pray,
I suddenly felt pity for the sun of that still late day...

Translation by THANH-THANH

WHEN I HAVE PASSED AWAY TAKE ME TO THE SEA

*Original “Khi Tôi Chết Hãy Đem Tôi Ra Biển”
by DU TỬ LÊ*

When I have passed away, take me to the sea;
An exile has nothing, even a tomb, though last and key.
Buried in foreign land, my corpse might not decompose,
My spirit can't leave, how to repatriate as they suppose?

When I have expired, take me to the heavy swells;
The adverse current will push my body without knells.
On the other side of the sea is my native soil,
Rows of bamboos thru time remain green despite coil.

When I have deceased, take me to the Pacific beach;
Remember not too soon to close my eyes, both or each,
So I may direct them towards my country a last time,
Lest my remains should not return to my dear clime.

When I have departed, take me to the west coast;
Do not hesitate or feel compassion for me this ghost.
Years ago, to fishes lots of people did fall prey;
Then, what's the use of one more distorted body, eh!

When I have faded away, take me to the ocean
For me to see again my children there, what emotion!
For me to watch them shed their hot tears stark
From their eyeballs that are already sadder than dark.

When I have gone forever, take me to the seaside,
And don't forget our national anthem singing to bide
(Oh, long since, nobody has chanted it anymore,
The song now has become almost a specter to bore.)

When I am dead, that melancholy will definitely end,
My exile's life and my nostalgic soul will well blend.

Translation by THANH-THANH

TO YOSEMITE THINKING BACK TO VIETNAM

*Original “Đến Yosemite Nghĩ Về Việt-Nam”
by DUY NẮNG*

To visit picturesque Yosemite, here I came
Just by becoming an exile being affected;
I looked at this scenery of universal fame
Upon which from my heart I sadly reflected.

Oh, this land in this corner of plain mirth
Over this far-away Pacific Ocean shore!
Any unusual things in the entrails of the earth
That send my sobbing soul sinking in sore?

How great mountains and rivers: this version!
But, why is it to differ from this glitter
So that suddenly I felt on a mere excursion
A confusing mixture of blithe and bitter?

My native home Nature had favored its flag
Nearly five thousand years to fly in its domain.
Alas! Who began to render it a tattered rag?
Its subjects scattered, sulking, suffering pain!

People have flocked to Yosemite here,
Each a contentment receiver and a peace giver.
Plants and trees, birds and beasts: clear sphere;
No cause to worry, fear, hesitate, shiver.

You may express to one another each view:
No police cordons on your way, the heavy load.
Everybody would stop and wait as due
For the tiny squirrel carefree to cross the road.

Night after night your sleep comes securely,
All right for you, honey, and for me too.
Life is wide and smooth like dreams to surely
Increase sounds and colors all the time through.

One nurtures of happiness a good sense
Obviously on his or her own face to tomorrow.
His talk and her smile need not be a pretense;
Your foreheads are not furrowed by sorrow.

Although for a brief moment here I came,
I did bear a grief for my old nation's sake.
Such high sky and deep waters are the same,
But just pondering over it makes my heart ache.

No difference, yet why in this strange world
Life has incessantly offered its open arms
While my left-behind Vietnam is swirled
Down into misery by the evil that only harms.

Well, Yosemite! I have already come here,
This beautiful site, from such a dark chapter.
I think back to my former country dear
And crave for a near future filled with rapture.

Translation by THANH-THANH

*Original “Tôi Đã Khóc”
by DU THỊ DIỄM BUỒN*

I then had to moan when my Mom passed away
As the enemy came to hamlets destroy and people slay,
The insensible bullets and shells to human bodies sever:
How she writhed in agony to part from us for ever.

I also sobbed that night, defeated by the hostile drive,
Of the broken April thirtieth, nineteen seventy five.
The frail boats crossed the windy and wavy ocean
To carry those souls with resentment-filled emotion.

I again mourned for my brother who deceased
In the Central Region's prison, ill-treated like a beast;
Over ten odd years his belief had become perpetuation,
Thus had not been shaken by the adverse situation.

I have lamented seeing our homeland distressed,
Each place-name a majestic feat – They are so blessed.
Thru many generations our ancestors' proud display
Now remains, alas! if not decline, mere decay!

I have bewailed all my adrift life – For them, for you,
I have cried for my compatriots and for myself too.
Deaths and grief aim at our people's heart to rend,
In this poor plight I might continue to cry without end.

Translation by THANH-THANH

SATISFIED TO WELCOME SPRING

*Original “Tự Tại Đón Xuân”
by DUƠNG HUỆ ANH*

Over twenty eight years in exile, haven't I been?
One more spring has already returned.
So great emotions arise with each soft breath;
How can I express all joy and sorrow I am concerned!

Glad? Because my children have succeeded,
Not better but not worse than what they deserve.
Food and clothes, houses, cars... pretty enough,
They just use their skill and energy society to serve.

Happy... Because some millions of my compatriots
Are able to live in peace, away from pain,
To repay their debts to the favorable host country:
The melting pot to give mercy is to refugees to deign.

Merry? Because history has begun a new chapter,
Our fatherland has started to rise, though late.
To be under renovation to contend with the world;
The glory of the Fairies and Dragons must not bate.

Cheerful? But sometimes somewhat sad:
 The young seem to forget their original brain.
 They pretend to be foreigners, act like money-bags,
 Organize struggle tricks – Are they wise or inane?

Those who have neither civil nor military ability
 Brag about their merits, after they gave up the game!
 Actually honest, judicious, or only sycophantic
 Following in the tail of the snobbish – Fie for shame!

Melancholy? Because my wits and talent are still
limited,
 Chances missed, literary perspectives seem to gloom;
 My writings remain insufficient to fill a hard disk
 Although it is a mercy to be a poet I might presume.

What else to be blue?
 My hair has already grown white, eyebrows sparse,
 However, from my mania for Beauty I cannot abstain;
 Earthly people are fond of glamor, gaudiness,
 Leaving thatched huts to sit in a royal palace to feign.

Oh joy, oh sorrow!
 I reconsider things and feel neither gay nor grieved,
 All is only unreal and illusory profiles.
 The world is changing together with the nation's
fatal styles.

Calm, self-contented, satisfied,
 I welcome Spring with laughter and smiles!

Translation by THANH-THANH

YOUR BIRTHDAY, CHRISTMASTIDE

(for my defunct younger sister)

*Original “Sinh Nhật Em, Mùa Noel”
by ĐẶNG LỆ KHÁNH*

The sky has turned gray and the weather cold,
It mildly drizzles like the kind of rain in Hue of old.
There is something to cause longings in the air:
The year is going to end or the spring to begin fair.

How many times since the last Christmas fête?
Were you still alive, we would surely celebrate.
For your birthday I would, with special complexion,
Make a cake quite sweet with all my affection.

I would mix the stuffing with my warm feeling,
Dress it with thousand mellifluous words appealing,
Adorn the surface with letters of congratulatory glee
And laugh resoundingly – how happy should we be!

It is needless to weigh or measure in order to bake,
Whoever can instruct how to create a love cake?
I would add an edge line as a thread of souvenir
To encompass the multicolored seeds for my dear.

I would light the candles – how many pieces, well?
But what's counting for, since time is in the sequel!
I only wish that the candles would spark to lighten
Your way in the misty world, salvation to heighten.

On your birthday I would write a small poem
And burn it for you on God's descent as a proem
So that at such a distant place you read it loudly
Gnawing at the cake I prepared for you so proudly.

I would try to prevent my hot tears from falling
So you're not too attached to the earth on recalling,
But, my cheeks suddenly got wet from nowhere:
It seems the rain is dripping, I am not even aware.

Translation by THANH-THANH

*Original “Hoài Non Nước”
by ĐÌNH DUY PHƯƠNG*

Oh my charming mountains and water, now being at bay,
My beloved motherland from Her I have been far-away!
My heart is suffering with deep regret for nostalgia, for all:
The sunlight fades, the evening grows dim, the leaves fall...

Translation by THANH-THANH

A MIGRANT BIRDS' SONG

Original "Tiếng Hót Của Loài Chim Xa Xứ"
by ĐÌNH DUY PHƯƠNG

The high sky is vast
The evening wind blows fast
There appears a young bird flight
From far sites out of sight
Drifting their wings over the seas
Alighting on a row of trees
Seeking for a snug nest
The birds begin to sing their best
Conveying this breath of life:
"There was a young wife
Through so many years
By the cooking fire shedding tears
In the tunnel longing for a light
With her husband to reunite
And then again one more year
For the pitiable woman to persevere
To eat her heart out in straits so dire
Beside the cooking fire
With the warm bowl of rice
Still awaiting her spouse so nice
To return to his wife to stay

Although just the other day
Everybody had already known
The husband her dear own
Had been executed by the evil band
Back in their native land!”

The sky is high and vast
Earth ever extends, seas ever last
A joss-stick heartily lit soon
A pale autumn moon
In place of a white ribbon to mourn
The poor woman young forlorn
She has reunited with her lover
In the fire glow to recover
In the spirit of their native land
The national martyr so grand
In history to live for ever

Translated by THANH-THANH

SOULS' HARMONY

Original "Linh Hồn Giao Hưởng"
by ĐÔNG ANH

I have now returned here where I saw you away
Nearly two years ago but it seems just yesterday.
The wind blows gently, the sun sheds yellow light
On the row of lopsided tombstones – what a blight!

The evening sun fell on every spotted tree root,
You were resting resigned in the coffin deaf mute.
Relatives couldn't help you being forever to depart,
Swallowed their choked sobbing into their heart.

Thru the crematory as to eternity a passport holder
At last stage you carried the cross on your shoulder.
I followed you, hanging down like a stooping leaf;
Your wife and children sank in inconsolable grief.

Here is the place I waved my hand in mind so sour
The last location you received each farewell flower:
The flowers were multicolored, but in such a dole
They were purple, gray, livid, dark inside my soul.

This is the crematorium with high-tension potential
Five thousand volts, to integrate with the essential
That to it even so hot, you were to yourself resign
Into dust, back to dust, oh this dear scion of mine.

I am standing here to invoke your wandering spirit
Relying on wind and clouds onto my shoulder to sit
So that father and son, our two souls harmonize,
I find happiness though in a jiff ceasing to agonize.

Translation by THANH-THANH

EVENING MELODY

*Original "Nhạc Chiều"
by ĐỖ HỮU (Lê Hữu Đỗ)*

Quite a chance that day the journey was granting
On our long way, the afternoon sun slanting.
Over the wind your singing voice took dominion
To lull human life's vicissitudes to oblivion.

What scenery! with smoke your eyes dimming,
The vast country over with tune was brimming.
Suddenly I reminisced about our motherland
So far that albatrosses hardly reach its strand.

Your hair was bob-waving against the stream;
Your lips ambitiously showed such a beam.
All at once I felt as though I had become of yore
In contrast with your prime of life in the core...

Then comes this journey you're out of my sight
And my way seems endless in the starlight.
How I miss you along each mile of wishing hot
Wondering if you still remember or simply forgot.

Translation by THANH-THANH

WORD REMINDER

*to Zen Master Khong Lo
Original "Nhớ Lời"
by ĐỖ HỮU*

This is an ideally geomantic terrain
For all-day endless pastoral love to gain.
Once upon that lonely cold hilltop high,
A long vibrating voice chilled the sky.

Translation by THANH-THANH

I AM STILL INDEBTED

*Original “Tôi Còn Nợ”
by ĐỨC HỒ*

I am still indebted to my ancestors and nation.
Oh Vietnam! why I can never soothe my frustration?
My love of our fatherland fervently boils in my blood
The military service had not satisfied my aspiration.

I still owe my Dad and my Mom for their kindness
So deep that the Pacific Ocean's depth is a dubiety.
The high and big Mt. Everest isn't worth mentioning;
My life is burdened with duties towards society.

I am still indebted to the world,
Having to contribute to the defense of my land.
A he-man of the times with heavy responsibilities,
I have had to live in exile to maintain my sand.

I am still indebted to my family and friends,
But how time limits human life.
Happiness isn't yet complete, joy neither perfect,
So I am reproached by buddies, kids and wife.

I am in debt and still in debt,
Owed to neighbors, even to future peers.
Generation succeeds generation
To witness Vietnam change its colors and spheres.

Innate ambitions haven't been fulfilled;
My country has still been pushed into fierce position.
When will Liberty and Democracy come true
For my compatriots to end their wretched condition?

On that day our national yellow flag will proudly fly,
Our people's heart and soul rejoice at its height;
And reveling in reviving the old bright times
We expatriates return to our Motherland in delight.

Translation by THANH-THANH

MY SADNESS IS IMMENSE
AS THE UNIVERSE INFINITE

*Original “Buồn Bao La Như Trời Đất Bao La”
by HÀ HUYỀN CHI*

The clear blue lake reflected the love grove;
Away the snow-evading swans humans drove.
Defoliant sprayed on grass, why to cause hate?
Where to fly the birds predetermined to migrate?

Where to hide the misfortune that great grew
As I had been foolish enough to rush to see you
So that I became unexpectedly the ugly stranger
After an abyss filled with distrust and danger

And that I turned suddenly into a solitary guy
With tired wings down to vicissitudes to tie.
Love did exist but now considered indefinite;
My sadness is immense as the universe infinite.

The surface of the lake mirrors a new bloom;
Even not looking back I do eternally gloom.
Thank you for the blissful days of emotion,
For not to feign affection or pretend devotion.

The red-crested songbird twittering its carol
Sounds like duns to have me over a barrel.
You are there but your life you did waive;
I am here but under some grass-covered grave.

Translation by THANH-THANH

P A I N

*Original “Nỗi Đau”
by HÀ LY MẠC*

This morning I called my name on my own
But it sounded strange like that of an unknown.
It turned out that I had forgotten my self of gold,
How thus to ask if one still remembers things of old!

Yesterday was different from today’s situation,
So a faithful bride is a promise for next incarnation.
The telephone ringing caused me distress,
The poem you read badly ruffled my soul to depress.

From now on, I have lost you – oh, my!
I’ve become a crane to call its flock in the foggy sky,
Flying towards the pinnacle of loneliness sphere
Giving back to you the yellow valley, my dear!

Translation by THANH-THANH

PLAIN FELICITY

*Original “Hạnh Phúc Đơn Sơ”
by HÀ THUỖNG NHÂN*

You are growing up, that means I am growing old;
But I continue to live because me in your flesh you
hold.

Each word that you say sounds so sweet and soft,
I hear it like the voice of angels or seraphs aloft.
Oh your arms so amiable, oh your feet so fine:
Branches and leaves for foliage in the ancient tree
design.

I will become stunted while you young sprouts shoot,
thus

My life will be multiplied by yours many times plus.
Some day in the morning sunlight or evening
moonlight

Perhaps to offer poetry to the universe you will also
write.

I am the fruit, you are each a seed;
In you I am always young, I will never get aged
indeed.

Oh my children... the new fair weather is again bright,
Limited life eventually becomes limitless to our
delight.
Thus I have never held it against me when coming to
bat
And only see compassion everywhere I look at
Since the taste of bitterness I have gone through as
honey.

I think of the time when you all start out, sunny,
To step on spikes and thorns, defying any road-block,
Crazily loving Liberty like me before, as drunk with
bock,
Erasing vindictive hatred in the future dictionary.

You will write about the exotic lands, each a visionary,
Standing at the foot of old Roman rampart now hushed
To witness the bricks with time mercilessly crushed:
Those palaces and castles have soon fallen into ruin.

They have perished, the suzerains once with so much
din;
Only peaceful and beautiful Le Louvre Museum exists
With imposing and impressive Eiffel Tower in Paris;
Only remain here the works that old architects
achieved
As original contributions by everybody perceived.

My dear children! We will never be lost:
Disappearance or existence all depends on our cost.
What would be more wonderful than an infinite
aspiration,
The unshakable beliefs based on a firm foundation?

We have got our lives, then we are living! Oh, what
bliss!
To live is to love... yes, live only to love, not to miss:
God looks at his image among humans as his mirror!

Translation by THANH-THANH

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

*Original “Tiếng Sét Ái Tình”
by HOA ĐỘ*

I want to amass, darling, all clouds in the sky
To imprint in it a First Love forever to reify!
Many a time I contemplate the horizon blue
And ask myself if it is truth or dreamy dew?
This love has happened without expectation;
Is it a dead certainty or a quick evaporation?
I feel like a dry desert luckily receiving rain
To turn a torrid terrain into a fertile domain.
Should I respond in full swing to my heart
Or consider it a lightning flashing like a dart
That bursts out, glorious but brief as a spark,
Then dies out and sink into the infinite dark
For my heart to writhe, in its prison a lout
In invisible railings impossible to get out.
Oh my lover!
Open up the whole immense heavens real
So that I can worship my love, the ideal!...

Translation by THANH-THANH

UNFINISHED SYMPHONY

*Original “Đường Tơ Chưa Dứt”
by HOA ĐỘ*

Away from you, my passion seemed perished;
I decided with my heart that blind devotion to sever.
I held a grudge against it when I determined to quit
And vowed not to return for ever and ever!

In the vast space, the free bird raptly spread wings;
But long distances finally wearied the eagle above.
Then, by chance, today I met again my old darling,
How I felt suddenly reliving our past autumn's love.

Is it repercussion of the past or lure of the time?
The yellow-turned leaves are on the tree to dote.
Has this soul still been affected by the old fall
When I saw your hand picking up my overcoat?

“Put it on lest you might catch a cold out there!”
Your tender words evoked so lovable your style.
I silently scanned you, although in a short instant,
With that affectionate look and that sweet smile.

I felt kind of fragile crystal in the atmosphere,
Hesitant to receive it, fearing waking up to the true.
I had sat admiring you through the whole afternoon
To get deeply entangled in my desire for you.

At this moment, however, watching you see me off,
I have to leave you in the cold winter wind rife.
Hanging my head, I desperately count the steps:
Shall I be thus a solitary traveller for all my life?

Translation by THANH-THANH

BLACK APRIL* AMERICAN-VIETNAMESE FRIENDSHIP

*Original “Tình Việt-Mỹ Tháng Tư Đen”
by HOÀI VIỆT*

Hi! Air Force comrades-in-arms!
At this get-together with Advisors, how happy to rejoice!
Facing Human Rights and Religious Freedom alarms,
“Democracy for Vietnam!” will be our common voice.

Welcome, Vietnam’s and Vietnamese friends!
How cordially Soldiers and Advisors this meeting
unites!
The Vietnam War in which we fought for Peace still
tends
To a Vietnam with Democracy, Liberty, and Human
Rights.

On this get-together, we shall say each his prayer
For the restoration of a peaceful Vietnam, with his share.

Hands shake, faces exult, lips bloom with a bright smile,
American—Vietnamese brotherhood boosts family ties.
Looking back on the old country, all tongues taste
bitter bile;
Reminiscing the past times, each heart dolorously cries.

Democracy is dreamt to reign in our native nation;
Liberty is wished to flourish throughout our beloved
land.

We, Air Force and Advisors, express our expectation
Of building a prosperous Vietnam, each lending a hand.

Translation by THANH-THANH

*April 30, 1975

LET ME LIE TOGETHER WITH YOU

*Original “Cho Tôi Nằm Chung”
by HOÀI VIỆT*

“What are you? Why do you lie there,
Exposed to sun and winds at this dumping ground?”
Only by getting close I could see your face:
Oh! “brother car” for your power once renowned!

You luxuriated in so brilliant a period:
How imposing, ostentatious, inspiring!
Inside, outside, upside, downside – all lustrous –
And at a time a fast-running champion so striking.

How affectionate your name was even just heard!
Either Toyota, Honda, GM,
Or Mercedes, BMW, Lexus,
All that are cherished in many hearts’ realm.

But now you are lying still in one place
Like a patient waiting operations to endure,
Having each of your parts disassembled;
Then, where your incarnation will reach for sure?

Brother car! Is still there enough room
To let me lie beside you?
A dump for cars or a graveyard for humans
Is the same, forever desolate and blue.

Brother car! My soul feels sad,
Because I am going to share your fate in hell.
Both of us did enjoy a past masters of highways,
And now it is time to such a life to bid farewell.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE SIX-YEAR-OLD GIRL

*Original “Em Bé Lên Sáu Tuổi”
by HOÀNG CẨM*

I

The six-year-old girl
drifted lonely looking for food.
Her Dad had paid his “blood debt” –
a “village bully” by the “Peasants’ Union” subdued.
Her Mom had left her behind helpless,
to flee to the South, the Party to elude.
Since she was just born,
fed with mother’s milk, sleeping in cosy bed,
clothed with flowered soft shirts,
she had not noticed such happiness instead.
While the Movement was launched to its height,
who would think of an unfortunate fate?
But, between humans and humans
there always is compassion to demonstrate.
Then, there was an indigent old man
who groped for crabs to live from day to day
that happened to meet the puny kid
whose parents had parted for far, far-away.
He suddenly felt pity for the orphan
and shared with her his scant chow.
With limbs scraggy like sticks,
belly being bulgy, neck bent as to bow,
and eyes round and red-rimmed,
she diffidently stared at passers-by to slur:
“Give me some gruel, madam!
A little rice, please, sir!”

II

There was a female cadre
while mobilizing the hamlet's mass to compete
unexpectedly heard the lost cry;
she looked towards the street
and shuddered to remember
the famine in the far-off year – who believes?

She, just only five years old,
had to lick the cake-wrapping leaves
in the market, then ran to the alley
to lead her younger brother home all right
and snapped giving him a half,
the handful of rice spared overnight.

The poorest-peasant key activist
turned her head, tears starting to her eyes:
– “Although being a landlord's child,
she is too young to know what horrifies.
That time I gave her a bowl of gruel;
I was therefore put to the rack for three days.”

The Team's Leader then stepped back
to contemplate the orphan in various ways,
trying to look for any certain enemy's track,
but found only a human, truly.

The child having been fed
lay down on the ground and slept fully.
She dreamt, “Our babies in the future
should be embraced and breast-fed duly.”

III

Her assignment was to be dismissed
because her acting so had been caught.
She lit the dim lamp in the cold night
to write her self-criticism report.

Because of the boneless tongue
that is not steel but it cuts as in an abattoir;
because of the dim-sighted
that cannot see horizons broad and far;
because of the lazy brain
that is all rusty like a corroded iron bar
for long years sleeping soundly
on the classic pages of hatred promoting art;
because of the robotic bodies
full of tendons but lacking a heart.

IV

Well, “Connected with reactionaries!”
“Off one’s political standpoint guard!”
She cried many nights continuously.
The oil lamp was so hazy and hard.
She asked herself and retorted:
“Why have pity on a foe’s child though fair?
Were I able to hate the kid,
How would I have been free from care!”

Translation by THANH-THANH

TO MISSISSIPPI

*Original “Nói Với Dòng Mississippi”
by HOANG LỘC*

You have flowed down here from the North;
Like you, I have drifted over here from the East.
We’ve been similar in our leeway thenceforth;
My life is melancholy, is yours too, at least?

Do you grieve? Why are you still running fast?
The farther you reach the wider/deeper you grow.
I am so sad, dizzy looking at you rushing past;
Missing my far native land I bow my head low.

Along your path everywhere alluvium giving,
Away from source a river knows to nourish Man,
While my blind alley is in search of a living,
Wanting to feed myself with joy hardly I can.

Back home, I have the modest Thu Stream
Which also knows to nurse people and self-love.
All my life to be like that dear river I dream
To flow among Love, round and round to rove.

Nevertheless, adieu to my country! So fervid
Up to this place, my return seems a blindfold.
The farther from its origin it gets more turbid:
Distraught with disgrace—Oh! pure flow of old!

You and me, we both are away from source:
We should have exchanged feelings all night.
Without worry, you continue your swift course,
Leaving me all solitary in exile in this plight!

Translation by THANH-THANH

GLORIFYING VIETNAM'S WOMEN

*Original “Vinh Danh Phụ Nữ Việt Nam”
by HOÀNG XUYÊN ANH*

On the Festival of Vietnamese Women, we glorify
Those who since thousands of years have not ceased to
try
To serve and respect their parents, love spouses and
kids,
Respond when family sentiment or citizenship
obligation bids.

Under the Trung Sisters and the Trieu, the brilliant
heroines
Who wrote the famous historical pages, those kingpins,
Our ancestors founded the country, established the
capital
For us, their descendants, to maintain for ever and for all.

The Vietnamese Women abide by family custom
understood
Night after night restlessly thinking of means of
livelihood,
Do small business, economize, make the most of their
nous
Working hard on the land, to create their dwelling-house.

Quite caught in vicissitudes, being exposed to wind
and rain
Because of their family situation, they endure deep pain.
Scorching sun and violent storms from above about
battered
With endless suffering they are like rose-petals tattered.
In this dusty world, the ocean so vast and the waves so
big,
They must try to hold so fast to the steering wheel, all
the rig
Until and so that the sea becomes smooth, the weather
calm
Though the willow branches crumple, their spirit is in
qualm.

The moon sheds light on their thin blankets and lone
pillows
While their dear men are at war facing threatening
billows.
They pine for them and have recourse to ardent
prayers
For them to be safe and sound, fire and sword no one
scares.

All of us, male as well as female, inheriting this
fatherland
Should rush into danger to happiness to our people
expand,
Determined to bring about our Just Cause, the nation's
pride,
As the Trung and the Trieu's glory well-known far and
wide.

With loyalty, righteousness, courage, difficulties will
shatter.
Do not worry, we wives at home undertake the family
matter.
About the parents, it's their daughters' responsibility
to serve
Like storks to feed the fledglings, they strain every nerve.
Resolved to fulfill the daughters and daughters-in-
law's duty
These women sacrifice their youth and green years'
beauty.

There is no more flowers and dreams to expect and hope
As in their girlhood, now wishes already beyond their
scope.

And those girls with many adversities have to stay in
the dew
With female charm fading, adrift into a foreign land
threw.
They lonely and silently contemplate the declining
moon
Feeling a biting cold, in the easterly wind, melody to
swoon.

Taking charge of income, contriving, economizing,
strenuous,
They do not care for their own bodies but only for the
fetus
Or for the newborn baby that continues to cry and
squirm,
They sense desolate on giving birth, impossible to
disaffirm.

As other people go out to sea together with so many a
friend
Why I have to suffer on my own such great misery no
end.
It is quite a bolt from the blue the news that you passed
away,
Heaven and earth seem to whirl along your endless way.

Alas, our sacred country was suddenly down on its luck,
By the communist ideology households and nation
struck.
The enemy disrupted our spousal relationship and
devotion,
Dad still in prison, children had to flee, crossing the
ocean.

The Vietnamese women, young, beautiful, virtuous
indeed
Travel up hill and down dale, their husbands to visit
and feed.
Solitarily in deserted bedrooms, staying up nights
through,
They do not care whatever the weather turns bad, so blue.

There are those who hold their life cheap, abashed
abroad,
Obliged to get married to invalids or lunatics just out
of fraud
By the slave traders, traders in human flesh, girl-
smugglers,
Who exploit their lost position, the badly damned
jugglers.

All the above-mentioned women have a significant mission
In the times' bad national, social, family, individual condition.

THE TRAIN WHISTLE

*Original “Tiếng Còi Xe Lửa”
by HỒ MỘNG THIỆP*

There is a railroad not far from where I dwell;
The night train wails within listening distance.
Its whistle in my remembrance recalls well
My Dad’s eager dream throughout his existence.

At least once he yearned, by his ardor urged,
To ride an express train from South to North
Right after the country from hostilities emerged,
To revisit old beautiful sceneries henceforth.

Alas, one day he deceased, still discontent,
Leaving behind the modest wish yet not come true.
But, were he to live unto this day of no consent,
He would feel each night more grief so undue.

*

Translation by THANH-THANH

PICTURESQUE FOR EVER

*Original “Muôn Đời Diễm Tuyệt”
by HỒ MỘNG THIỆP*

You inquired after me, while in exile, into my sand
Whether I have ever felt missing our motherland,
Pitied and regretted the abundance of the past
When the peaceful sun everywhere was shining fast?

Yes, be it picturesque for ever the countryside,
With kites flying over the far end of the dyke,
White storks walking alongside many a rice field,
Some flute herding buffaloes home so sweet a yield!

Narrow roads, green bamboo hedges surrounding,
Rows of arecas swaying in the fresh wind mounting,
The ferry-sampan reflecting in the water its image,
Rice-pestling songs echoing in the moonlit village.

And admiring the immense universe, those times,
While tasting scented tea we compose our rhymes,
Pervaded with the flavor of our native place,
Both souls leavened under the starred space.

But, at present, one at stay, the other at large,
Our separation is on my heart a resentful charge.
You, unfortunate, have gotten caught in damnation,
And I, though free, involved in human situation.

I am afraid of twilight, of shadow of night,
Of time arousing more and more grief in my plight.
Oh, homeland, relatives and friends! No assistance
Of any eagle could bridge such an infinite distance!

Translation by THANH-THANH

DAD'S MERIT IS LIKE MT. EVEREST

Original "Công Cha Như Núi Thái Sơn"
by HUỆ THU

"Dad's merit is as immense as Mount Everest!"
That verse since a child I had known with zest,
But now heard again makes tears start to my eyes.
My country has been half of my life in hard times,
Partitioned in two when I was just ten years of age.
The mothers poured from the North in a critical stage
And thenceforth began in the South to revive;
But everywhere anguish continued from war to derive:
The young men with neither complaint nor regret
Rushed into the battlefields, their hopes on life set.

You were born, not in time yet to build dreams rather,
Not seeing your father yet, you already had no father.
I your Mom brought you up, in tears educated you kid:
Dad loved me, loved you—and loved Vietnam sacred,
Fulfilling his duty, not yielding an inch of ground,
Using his body to pay his debt to the country bound.

Now that you might be said to have got some success
Enjoying democracy, liberty, being free to express,
Yet sometime in your innermost you suddenly
understand
Why your mother had to leave home for this land!
I surely felt heart-broken – my deep grief increased
When as a baby you naïvely asked why Dad deceased.

Oh my child, Freedom has its though high price,
But without it we cannot be human beings so nice.
On Father's Day, watching the smile of each of your
chit
I am happy because we are able to live a life fit.
The word Democracy with Dad was such a dream:
Write it on his votive tablet to honor him as we mean.

Translation by THANH-THANH

AUTUMN TREES AND HUMANS

*Original “Cây Mùa Thu Với Người”
by HUỖNH MAI HOA*

Trees have passed through the cold winter,
To nourish budding branches, receiving mist and
snow.

In silence they create fresh flowers
To offer life so many beautiful colors to glow.

Trees have experienced the warm spring,
Welcoming rosy sunlight greener leaves to render,
Hosting the wind to softly lull the boughs
As twigs and blades cosset the blooms' splendor.

Trees have subsisted through the sand season,
Bearing summer on trunks tanned and barks dry,
Still waiting for ripe fruits so long longed for,
The fresh sweet produce, being stunted to defy.

Trees have survived so many changing periods,
Feeling merry in spring and numbed in cold.
Do trees suffer thirst in sultry summer
After dripping for life so many drops of water
gold?

Do trees sense fatigue so when summer just left
Autumn hurries back to accept falling yellow
leaves?
Autumn lulls trees to a deadly sleep on the
sidelines,
Awaited resuscitation, to seek for sap that
achieves.

Have humans, looking at trees, ever wondered:
Trees or humans are to endure more displeasure?
Leaves on trees can be changed many times;
How many times may humans all life rest at
leisure?

If humans were lulled by autumn to sleep
To cast off their shoulders what has been
downbeat,
They would advance up in spite of long distances
To perfect everything that is still incomplete.

Translation by THANH-THANH

HOW COULD YOU KNOW

Original "Làm Sao Em Hiểu"
by HUỲNH NGỌC ĐIỆP

How could you know the suffering in my life,
The sadness that impregnates around
Even each blade of grass on any mound,
Each breath of air that wafts by my side?
In the dark alley of my autumn soul
I am crying without anybody to condole.

How could you know about
The untruthfulness in your existence to garble:
Immovable like a trite block of marble
To let each step turning strange and fading out
Since in life you have parted our route.

How could you be aware
Of the bitterness that I taste?
Missing you until the last hour of my fate:
Love still means to betray any swear.
Compassion upon myself I take,
Being a lost-in-the-horizon cloud to bear.

How could you figure out
The mendacity in your brain?
As from a bit of foam in some light rain,
A shade of sorrow in some wandering cloud,
You faked oblivion and averted your glance:
I looked away in an embarrassed stance.

You shattered my happiness whole,
I burnt the send-off incense in my soul.

How could you see it clear
The cemetery in my deep heart
With flowers falling down tattered all year
Like petals of grief falling down to life's yard
When the leaves leave the branches bare
Like tired arms having to loosen the embrace.
Chagrin spreads with each of my narrow pace,
I am crying without anybody's care.

I am crying alone,

How could you get it learned?

In solitude I moan:

My vital cause has been finally away burned,
And my soul too with far-away clouds swirled.

Translation by THANH-THANH

A MOTE

*Original “Hạt Bụi”
by HUỖNH NGỌC ĐIẾP*

Only a mote that got into your eye
Could incite tears, a silently falling rain.
The slightest thing that hints at that pain
Would suffice for my heartache to multiply.

Translation by THANH-THANH

SADNESS

*Original “Nỗi Buồn”
by HUỖNH NGỌC ĐIẾP*

It seems that it is raining in the street,
The autumn wind causing dead leaves to fall,
And some bad memories sadder than a grief
On the autumn dawn to impregnate my soul.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Original “Trái Cấm”
by KHANG LANG

Since the beginning – the earth full of dust,
The forbidden fruit in Eden still on the tree –
Our first ancestors ventured to eat it. Gee,
Doting on Eve, Adam sinned after love to lust!

Temptations have lured us to banned dreams
Just as we need passions for spell in a lifetime,
Hunger for sensations, a heartwarming prime,
Thirst for reveries to fill the soul that beams.

The world is so ancient! Our life-style so trite!
Days are so stale! Living habits so out-dated!
Even our attachment has become antiquated!
Darling! Courting words have grown a bite!

Whether you change your clothes many a turn
Or always make yourself up, you still look old,
Although fall leaves have begun to turn gold,
Inviting the season, suggesting Spring's return.

Even if my heart in metempsychosis succeeded
So that I could renew my love in renovation,
Our affection would reach pain as destination,
Being moss-grown, incapable of being weeded.

Sped by seductions for taboos we have craved
As we need passions through thick and thin:
Above our first ancestor and the original sin,
– Coiled round the branch, the serpent stayed!

Translation by THANH-THANH

GREEN SCENE

*Original “Màu Xanh”
by LA TOAN VINH*

I have already come back to my homeland,
But why I feel missing something today?
Is it that I need the whole sky,
your hair to float and the wind to play...

This afternoon I stop by the old village,
look at each row of trees, each leaf tho mean:
this flavor always moves my heart,
just a painting of still-life green.

There remains forever the naive smile
as you offered me the fruits so sweet,
and you seemed to have something to say
for the immense scenery with a heartbeat.

Your smile does not fade through the years,
your youth is never by time bound.
Oh my Binh Duong beauty in my memory,
the memory of the prime of love found...

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE OLD SHELF

*Original “Ngăn Tủ Cũ”
by LÊ MAI*

The old shelf
After ten years I came back to rearrange.
From the books and notebooks range
Fell out the veins of violet-dyed fig tree leaves:
The sight of which more and more aggrieves
Reminding me of my dear green years
With now so long-ago those cheers...

The dusty autograph books each showing
Each page with friendship overflowing
As I turned over, I reviewed each classmate:
Who were still alive, who had already found fate,
Who succeeded in fleeing as yearned,
And who however returned...

In my mind revived the white dresses of fays
And their laughter like on back-to-school days,
The small kiosk with the glasses of juice,
The rear laps sneakily knotted love to introduce...

Oh memories of youth! Thence
Nostalgia immense
In my self!
Oh my old shelf!
Ten more years, ah!
And after ten more years – who could debar?
When has grown white my hair
To-pine-for and to-miss shall I for ever bear...

Translation by THANH-THANH

DIALOGUE BETWEEN MAN AND MUSE

*Original “Đối Thoại Người và Thơ”
by LÊ NGUYỄN*

I

What have expressed thousands of pages of verse
Through ups and downs of life I have been absorbed in?
Because that little bit I got life does not need,
But what life wants has been impossible for me to win!

Well, so be it! – Months after months silently
I have lived and wished it a meaningful one each day.
Sixty years old, I just await going to the grave-yard
Bidding farewell to this world, a long thorny bitter way.

Is it that misery sets Pegasus on wing?
And if it is so, why of it do I not dream?
In this painful existence truth and falsehood contradict,
How many lines please me amongst so many a ream?

Poetry reaches heights – waves still wail at sea;
Power worn out, ability exhausted, will in degeneration,
I suffer agony in deep heart, laden with resentment,
To pity my native country submerged in tribulation.

At dusk, at night, this stranger sits missing the jungle,
The past heroic period – followed by the arduous time!
To take off fatigues, put on prisoner's uniforms:
Oh motherland! Had we committed what crime?

In June nineteen seventy five, my Mom saw me off;
On my return, over her cold tomb green grass grew.
My heart hurt, grudge blood rose to my eyes:
What was the use of rhymes in such writhing rue?

II

For what reason, Poetry has not spoken up anything?
Originally innocent – poetry is my predestined career.
Man and Muse have had times fallen down together:
Besides my ballad stanzas who else is my loyal dear?

Wherever I feel distress, you offer me your smile;
Whenever I tumble, it is you who help me rise again.
For over forty years – poetry since then as my lover
Accompanied me on each battlefield and in each chain!

You opened my eyes and mind, aroused my belief;
In my hour of despair, you were my very torchlight.
Through thirteen unjust years you were my intimate
To soothe my hunger, cold, shame in each winter
night.

The quilted jacket could not yield warmth as the
verse
That replaced a blanket to wrap up my body in
disfavor.

My pen is still here to tell the story to the world:
To the insipid manioc, Poetry's grace was to add savor.
How can I have the heart to forget the long hard
years?

You reinforced my breath, my life and death lover –
Poetry – for me to survive and to hold firm to my
faith!
To cease writing, lose my joy of life, who would
cover?

III

You, bright torch, sharp sword, fresh rose, warm blanket,
Cool breeze in the earthly stifling noon full of slime!
I apologize, I owe your favour, in awoken reflection
I heartily pledge devotion to you, Poetry, all lifetime.

Translation by THANH-THANH

CONFIDING IN BROTHER

*Original “Tâm Sự cùng Em Trai”
by LUÂN HOÀN*

There seems to be a bird-nest under the thatch roof,
I was pleased to hear the adult preen the young.
How I remember the bamboo cage I clasped as a kid
with little creatures to which my passionate eyes clung.

Now that those fledglings were perhaps learning to fly,
Please give me the small stone from your hand.
This is the bit of Conscience that still remains in me:
Have the heart using it to shoot at them? What brand!

I can even recall a sunset, on a grass edge,
a pair were mating. My hands wavered at the sight
while aiming the catapult. Aware of my adolescence,
I allowed their Love to freely fly with the birds' flight.

Thenceforth too I pledged to prize Life forever;
but now why do such tears foam to blur the elation?
The blanket so thin to cover the chest so deserted;
Could you hear beyond the smiling lips the desolation?

Perhaps the resonance of some exploding shells
piercing the air, tearing our motherland's intestines.
Men after men have died for Liberty to survive,
bodies as manure to fertilize the grass as fate destines.

I was hesitant to say this since long I have meant to:
Poor Dad swapped his sweat for food to feed each son.
Mom luckily has rested in peace in earth's womb,
We brothers each of us have our life lonely and dun.

Do not reproach me for leaving our dear dwelling
to walk the streets, especially from studies to depart.
Have you also been every night lying in bed reflecting?
Oh, please, stop crying — Do not rend apart my heart!

Translation by THANH-THANH

MY VU LAN PRESENT

*Original “Món Quà Vu Lan”
by MẠC PHƯƠNG ĐÌNH*

I gazed in the album at my dear Mom’s picture
And realized that now is so far-off her figure
I listened to the rain as if on my heart flick
The wind blow making me agitatedly nostalgic

Although is abundant my current subsistence
Neither my Mom nor my Dad stays in existence
As a child I was so dull being by Mom kissed
Now that I know whom to love, Mom is missed

Mom departed this life during a difficult time
Scurrying beneath the burden in our poor clime
Until your last days on manioc hand to mouth
While I was in prison as a “puppet” of the South

Such a hard period Dad and Mom bore your part
That feeling of gratitude I bury deep in my heart
Dear Mom please accept from this sad son adrift
On this commemorative day my little humble gift

Vu Lan mid-seventh month, the filial duty event
Between life and death how far to suffer torment
Joss-sticks and candles spark, the wind uprears
I don't cry but why my eyes get wet with tears

Translation by THANH-THANH

MELANCHOLY

*Original “Buồn”
by MINH CHÂU*

The sky is gloomy, sadness spreads on every path;
The birds flock to fly, shelter or try nests to find.
The black clouds wildly move fast;
The wind at nightfall repeatedly ruffles each blind.

The blurred light blinks on the wandering road;
Suddenly I feel my heart vastly solitary.
Without the sun, the beams seem owing a grudge;
The scene is quiet, the air ceases its tune liminary.

Such a sad day silently follows a previous one;
Who would understand this situation of mine?
Life is a vacant space,
And love a sea foam that will dissolve in the brine.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE HUMANE HEARTS

*Original “Những Tấm Lòng Nhân Ái”
by NGOC AN*

From a far-away hardship-ridden country,
A war-ravaged native land sunk in welter,
My people, trying to survive troubled times,
Swallowed resentment to flee and seek shelter.

How many cities there are on the globe,
My Vietnamese compatriots are in most present;
Even on the snow-covered high mountain areas,
We, as refugees, willingly accepted, pleasant.

Twenty seven years adrift in this new country,
Many have luckily succeeded getting homes to own,
Creating positions and fame worthy of being Viet,
Though some with their old state into perils thrown.

Twenty seven years, so much favor and felicity!
The US, Germany, France, Canada, Australia, so on
Have so far helped our folks in their lives with
Physical and intellectual comforts to build upon.

As for me... ten years in this foreign land
I have witnessed freedoms, press, human rights,
Civilization, modernization everywhere
As hard working, hard studying lead to heights.

Thank you for all of your humane hearts
With my genuine rhymes of inmost laudation.
We Vietnamese communities pledge devotion
To lifetime service to every resettlement nation...

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE LOVING HEART

Original "Trái Tim Yêu"
by NGOC AN

I have passed half the circumference of the earth;
Now that I have met you, the first time I fall for.
Any charcoal fire is much less valued,
Because its heat contains no spiritual life's core...

The amorous heart is the noble heart;
Entering it I feel warmer than being a fireplace by.
Oh my affectionate soul! so immense, infinite,
I have waited every minute for your love to reify.

My darling! please understand my sentiment:
How I feel cold through nights in the lonely room.
I wish I might have you cherish me dawn till dusk
So that my solitary soul stays no more in gloom.

My life will not be any longer tenebrous
Like evening dew to mist the countryside line.
Oh my sweetheart! how I feel awkward,
Not able to express enough new feelings of mine.

I only see all the inspiring joy in my depths rise
If I may be offered a life beside you to realize...

Translation by THANH-THANH

SPRINGTIME LOVE WORDS

*Original “Lời Tình Mùa Xuân”
by NGOC AN*

I suddenly feel strangely nostalgic
Each time the swallows soar overhead.
Looking up I think it's our native sky, above
Emerald bamboos, golden rice widespread.

If you get back there take my deep thought
To the pretty river in the full moonlight,
The green reeds under the spring sun,
Each noisy wave stirring the sea at night.

The looming mountainsides at dusk,
The dying beams, the glimmers bland,
Like a painting with pervasive smoke
At sunset – So picturesque our native land!

If you get back there send my true words.
After ten years abroad I am drifting still;
So many bud times have come again,
I have silently cried by myself on the sill.

It is late in winter, it is dead cold;
Losing one's country is losing one's range.
From thousand miles away, my love;
Once exiled, earth and sky are to change.

You go back there convey my best wishes
With full feeling and whole heart of mine
For peace and happiness for everybody
While awaiting the dear dawn's shine.

Translation by THANH-THANH

AUTUMN'S VESTIGES

Original "Đầu Chôn Thu"
by NGOC AN

This morning, I feel the cold of the breeze:
Autumn has returned! – of which are you aware?
In the mellowing sun, my soul senses sadness,
My heart grief, seeing the clouds err everywhere.

I suddenly remember an old fall in Da Lat:
The misty pall over the Lam Vien pines—what décor!
The mimosa buds resembling drops of tears;
The ripples stirring the green lake shore...

I have not enjoyed an autumn in Hue:
The dreamy city cradling the primal palaces so rife.
Whose city... why too many sunny days and rains?
How I wish I could visit it once in my life!

I also was told of the fall in Ha Noi
When the cold wind brings back regret for history,
The dead leaves landing on the desolate streets,
And the Lang Bac Lake keeping its mystery.

Well, I have so far traveled nine autumns alone;
The foliage abroad here turned red and gold,
But within me so many souvenirs grew withered:
What nostalgia for our far-away country of old!

As you know, I have waited, so many eves,
For a fall, together we pick up yellow leaves...

Translation by THANH-THANH

FACING MY LOVER'S IMAGE

*Original “Đối Bóng Tình Nhân”
by NGOC AN*

By your autograph I imagine you thru good hand;
Your bequeathed confidential verses I understand.
In the late moon I restlessly wait still
Looking at the far woods, the snow-covered hill.

I want to reminisce in our old love to immerse
Our boat being smooth but the current adverse.
My shore of affection is a vast sea of grief;
I procrastinated all the year round without relief.

I mean to say a love word in despair;
It is late: two ways have separated here and there.
Tears of torment to me can't be an avoidance;
Your image, I inherited, looks at me in annoyance.

You are that far, from such an infinite space
Keep an eye on me but know it out of embrace.
Winter is not so cold as the cold in my heart:
Once to depart this life is for ever to part.

Although divided, by immense passes to impede,
Please try to listen, I deeply wish to plead:
Let me have the chance to face my lover's image
Even once only in a brief dreamy pilgrimage!

Translation by THANH-THANH

LIFE IS LIKE LEAVES

*Original “Đời Như Chiếc Lá”
by NGỌC AN*

When the leaves are green, your love blossoms:
Its wonderful perfume is through time pervading.
When they tarnish, your heart becomes confused:
Love is gone like algae that have drifted fading.

When the leaves grow yellow your face turns dim
Like, on fading shrubs, last beams of the dying sun.
They are dried: your eyes blurred and hair lost,
Skin wrinkled and forehead worn-out hard to shun.

When the leaves fall down, they open the way
For you to ashes to return, from mishaps to escape.
So, let us cherish it, as long as the foliage is green:
You know it — Life is like in the tree leaves’ shape.

Aspirations vanish when branches’ leaves leave:
In the same way, of Beauty dust will all bereave.

Translation by THANH-THANH

SEAWEED

Original "Rong Rêu"
by NGOC AN

The evening is coming late;
The sun gradually fades on each high hill.
You hurriedly call out for me to halt and wait;
There is not a star in the sky immense and chill.

You are unlucky, I am unsteady;
You go into darkness, I come into dejection.
What for since on the wane already is my
complexion.

Let us live each like a clam
Quiet in its shell, not giving a damn
Thirty years bittersweet...
Ups and downs, getting into a jam
For vicissitudes to maltreat.

I wish I could crucify
Once the silk spread...
The spider that span at random its webs by
To waste the cocoon's selectivity so long bred!
My shape through days has got to recede
And my love thru years... covered with seaweed!

Translation by THANH-THANH

REVEALING LYRIC

*Original “Khúc Tự Tình”
by NGỌC AN*

There was once I looked like a leaf withering,
Facing dreams nights crying over my appearance,
Hearing in the cold penthouse crickets whispering
Arousing dole in their monotonous perseverance.

I then seemed nearly to be kind of alga blades
Drifting along with such an immense water flow.
Where was each petal of time falling in the shakes
To make my poor lonely soul so tinted with woe?

I felt myself similar to a willow dried and bare
Standing lonesome by that roadside segregated
Listening to the coming Autumn in a breath of air.
No more past halo: what for was it to be waited?

But now, however, all of a sudden, I have you,
A littlish love which both of us just got fondly lit.
Oh yes, how this passion acts as a ball of fire due
To light my heart with innermost feelings in it.

I had heretofore spent half of my dear existence,
And it had left me only the moment of grief rife.
Let me use this remaining half of my subsistence
To share with you the ups and downs of our life.

Translation by THANH-THANH

I HAVE COME BACK TO SAN JOSE

*Original “Em Về San Jose Rồi”
by NGOC BÍCH*

I have come back to San Jose with it I identify,
Leaving behind of fond remembrances a whole sky.
I bade farewell hesitantly to the previous location,
While the car wheels rotated slowly on separation.

I have come back to the Yellow Flowers valley
To find oblivion in the birds' song down my alley.
The spring rain drops its drops innumerable
Of love, of memories: where they go? unanswerable.

I have come back to conceal my particular pain;
Might it be... To let it go with the current am I fain?
Time will pass as swiftly as do wind and clouds,
Only myself will remain with life's ups and downs.

I have come back here at the end of my prime.
How much I miss him will be no more with time.
Evening purple clouds are attached to the hillside,
This lonely exile is into the decline of day to slide.

I am back; my solitary image the mirror closes.
Well, I blow a kiss to the past with thousand roses.
I am already back to San Jose now,
Entrust myriad love words to poetry Heavens endow.

Being alone in the evening sunlight here,
In San Jose, is it not the wind very cold – my dear?

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE FLAMES FLARED MY PAIN

9/11/2001

*Original “Lửa Cháy Niềm Đau”
by NGỌC THỦY*

Smokes and flames, blood and tears
on the television screen spread dyeing.
On September the eleventh in California
I tuned in, watched and burst out crying.

Oh, my God! I saw New York tumble,
Washington DC's heaven and earth quake.
Terrorism! War! yells and shouts resounded
clearer than ever before to make me shake.

The States had been in peace and left open,
the barbarous profited from this to violate;
they hijacked the planes, piloted, crashed
casting their trunks thousands' fates to waste.

The Twin Towers submerged in the smokes,
the Pentagon's steel and stones fell into ruin.
Alas! the whole America got in panic,
the whole world startled, disgusted at the sin.

The heartless terrorists, seeing human blood,
were they satisfied, madder in this condition?
what species are they that hate coziness?
who are they that only thirst for demolition?

Whatever happened nobody 'd starve in the US
but would die of pangs of human pain;
though the States is not a paradise,
were it chipped, what'd of the world remain?

The terrorists did really embarrass
not only this country but the world affiliation;
the elite will make up their minds
considering measures in revenge, retaliation.

Oh, friends! my heart ached all that morning
and has so far suffered such sadness sable;
I have been astonished and wondered why:
though pitiless the terrorists are still able?

Million hands were raised demanding to fight!
million prayers were said asking to excuse!
I felt so compassionate for President Bush:
he was moved the historical course to choose.

Flags and flags are hung, door to door expand;
in melancholy the States is still forever grand.

Translation by THANH-THANH

FAREWELL FOREVER, TWIN TOWERS

*Original “Vĩnh Biệt Tháp Song Sinh”
by NGỌC THUY*

the truck moved with much fag
carrying the last post of steel
covered with the US flag
like a river flowing inchmeal...

oh, that river filled with tears
coursing thru life with many a wind
in the heart of New York's spheres
leaving Ground Zero behind

I looked at the TV screen
with my eyes in lachrymal pain
not only myself crying at the scene
whoever unmoved could remain?

constructed in joy at most
devastated in sobs to condole
the poor last steel post
plunged deep down my soul

oh, New York's sky agleam
where the clouds from now on
carry streams of tears' steam
flying over Ground Zero yon!

Translation by THANH-THANH

UNDER THE PURPLE FLOWERS

*Original “Dưới Giàn Hoa Giấy Tím”
by NGÔ BÍCH LAN*

*“I suddenly remember and miss
I suddenly reminisce about his kiss
My lips bewitched with the old cicadas’ carol...”
(from the song “The First Kiss”)*

In the purple flowers’ shade
You kissed me the first kiss.
The moon lit its light of jade;
The cicadas sang their song of bliss.

Then, time passed fast and blind;
You went to your studies above
Leaving the purple flowers behind
With such a dreamlike love.

In each letter sent to the old place
You said you still missed this start
With the purple flowers of grace
And this young and true heart.

I have come back each day alone
To see the old flowers obsess
And hear the cicadas groan;
I feel such a vague distress.

I have nurtured my pastoral love
Now that summer is back to see
With the purple flowers above
I become an amorous banyan tree.

Translation by THANH-THANH

GOOD-BYE

*Original “Tiễn Biệt”
by NGÔ BÍCH LAN*

*“In the Lyon Station’s yellow light
I held my tears to hold your hands tight
Whatever I said were now too late...”
(from the musical piece “Seeing You Off”)*

Since I left Paris City
Has the Seine whispered my name?
The night station’s lights were misty, bitty;
And my kiss I left beyond the endgame.

How I miss you, lips warming lips;
Arms clung tight, but love then got lost!
Your image on the platform in eclipse
That once with sorrow my heart mossed...

Translation by THANH-THANH

DRIFTED IN THE HUSTLE

*Original “Lạc Nẻo Phồn Hoa”
by NGÔ ĐỨC ĐIỂM*

I stepped into the noisy urban area with colors gay,
Astonished at skirts with silks cheerfully to play,
Ruby lips opening the wings of life’s dreams so dear,
And lost my way, straying into this exile’s sphere.

My sad age was to be hidden in the poor gray hair;
My empty hands let go any grief like my palms bare.
My shoulder inclined by half the burden of devotion
Made me feel like washed ashore from the ocean.

My inspiration was vast with nostalgia like space,
I wrote popular rhymes to send to my native place
As if to pick up the dead leaves along that war trail
To cast on the sea to conjure up spirits that bewail.

Time immemorial would leave words to posterity
Tho in vicissitudes to love each other with sincerity.
The far Sea Dragon and Mountain Fay will assuage;
I plight to return to our root to saunter in my old age.

Translation by THANH-THANH

FAREWELL FOR EVER, TWIN TOWERS!

To New York with all my regret

Original "Chào Vĩnh Biệt Twin Towers"

by NGÔ MINH HẰNG

The flames are blazing up in mid-air, oh flare-ups!
The obscure, furious smokes are blackening the
clouds.

The ruins left after the dreadful explosions:
Thousands of bodies buried in the fire that enshrouds.

Is this a fiction movie or the very truth that has been
More terrible than in one's imagination or dream?
In panic the crowds are weeping, crying, screaming;
Tears have fallen but minds still doubt the scheme.

Oh God! Is this mankind's globe or hell
Where ferocious fiends are fiercely roasting souls,
And in an instant thousands of humans slumped down
And sank into such a full sea of live coals!

The whole world is astounded by the horrid cruelty,
Boiling mad at the blood-thirsty bands,
While in the dark, beyond the burnt flesh and bones,
The wicked wildly cheer and clap their hands!

Devils! With your mass destruction instruments
Thousands of people have lost thousands of their kin!
Their happiness, their aspiration for a fulgent future
Suddenly have got into pangs because of your sin!

There I stand, on the riverside, with wet eyes
Looking at the seething inferno of smoke-and-flame:
Oh, how I wish, even though smashed to smithereens,
I could show gratitude, save the wonder and its fame!

Oh, the splendid symbol of prosperity in a bright time
Is writhing and collapsing in the inhuman
conflagration
And reminding all citizens all over the planet
To be always on guard against any evil machination.

Farewell for ever! I feel pain in my exile pneuma;
Twin Towers, the so much dear and beloved sign,
Will remain in my sentiments — Since an immigrant
From afar, I have embraced this new Country as mine.

Translation by THANH-THANH

MY SISTER

*Original “Chị Tôi”
by NGÔ MINH HẰNG*

My sister that New Year was sixteen, a naive civilian:
Her cheeks just began to grow rosy, her lips vermillion;
Her eyes symbolized the azure sky, her heart a green
bud;
Her soul was filled with warmth, the spring sun
lifeblood.

Although she was only sixteen,
So many guys had already dreamed of a wedding scene.
And many a virtuous mother even had wished pride
Of having her as hopefully her son’s well-behaved bride.

Pure and proper as the fragrance of pomelo flowers,
Her maidenhood had not been rippled by flirtation
powers.

As time passed, it had added to her cheeks more rose
To illuminate the moon’s light and dim the dove’s pose.

One day from some deep jungle, a soldier, man of
mettle,
Sent her a pink letter together with an orchid petal.
While she had not opened his letter yet,
Black April already set up a white mourning net.

How frightening! Everywhere was full of blood and fire.
As if to break the sky exploded the Soviet missiles dire.
They shelled the populace and she was hit:
Golden dreams, green age, perfume and beauty to quit!

Her Mom embraced her body, thought a nightmare
maybe.

Her younger sister, yet an innocent baby,
Seeing their mother bitterly crying, also wept,
And inanelly called her sister whose hand she dearly kept.

She lay motionless in her Mom's arms there
With her meek big and round eyes, with a fixed stare
In bewilderment with a thousand questions in her brain:
"Who has brought thunderstorms to this peaceful plain?"

War anywhere, in spirit rapture, they continued to
expand.

She died with his letter still held in her hand.
Her blood gradually permeated to redden all words he
sent.

– Murderers! You killed my sister, are you content?

Translation by THANH-THANH

A FALLING STAR

Thanks to my sponsor on “Thanksgiving Day”
Original “Một Vì Sao Vỡ”
by NGÔ MINH HẰNG

You have really left me, have you not, Gene?
 What heaven broke away, what star fell apart!
 Your bountiful benevolence and my great gratitude
 Through seventeen years have piled up in my heart.

I came here seventeen years ago, empty-handed
 But with a crowd of young children in my care,
 A mental wound, two tearful eyes, homeland lost,
 Family broken up, and of how to live unaware.

You opened your arms to receive me
 Even though I was not of your same race.
 The humane heart does not have any borders;
 Just only an act of charity is the main base.

I fell down, you helped me up very tenderly;
Your heart of gold's radiance was so brightly clear.
I felt when a child in my dear mother's embrace
That lead me step by step into the worldly sphere.

And thus seventeen years had passed fast,
The longer the duration the deeper the emotion.
For your good deeds I had not rendered thanks
But already met death separation beyond notion.

You have already parted, already quitted life
Leaving your loved ones and leaving me here.
For eternity your flesh and bones will go to dust
But your generosity will still shine inside your dear.

You have really gone away, departed from me:
The bottom of your grave, or is it that of my mind?
Esteemed friend, I wish you a forever happiness
Living in God's divine blessing peace to find!

On this occasion of Thanksgiving, oh Gene,
I send to infinity my tears mixed with each rhyme.
The bowl of rice at the time of need is so precious;
I have engraved in my heart feelings of my lifetime.

Translation by THANH-THANH

REFLECTION

Original "Soi Gương"
by NGUYỄN PHƯƠNG

Yes, this far-away strange domain,
Of my own volition, I silently did attain.
Seeing clouds and winds on cloud nine
Courting one another in the shine,
I looked at the sky and earth around
Without any aim, without any ground.

But I observed myself and was surprised
That in my inmost feelings I realized
A source of sorrow so profound.

Days after days, hours after hours
Over this Valley of Yellow Flowers
Each morning, midday, afternoon, eve
Passes in a hurry causing me to grieve.

In this land of promises it is to bear
There are lots of bridges to well wear;
All of them are so wide to give fright
To my hair to turn more snow-white.

What reason? That one is to contrast
Freeways running smoothly and fast
With my still poor condition of living:
A sluggish canal muddy waters giving.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE STATUE

*Original “Pho Tượng”
by NGUYỄN PHƯƠNG*

There seems to be of vexation a shade;
Melancholy through time seemed to accumulate.
To count the planets and stars I sat trying:
All couldn't be seen, except sadness higher rising.

I felt that you took it all in your stride,
Putting on new gown to part with my love to
decide.

Home returned I, and over slopped the wine,
Somewhat tipsy to get, what for to pine?

There appeared to loom on the other bank
You became the idol awaiting the moon blank.
I stood to admire from this riverside, still,
Your eyes looked indifferent, far-away to chill.

You have turned into such a lifetime statue!
And I the artist to paint your image that much blue!

Translation by THANH-THANH

JESUS RESURRECTED

*Original “Chúa Phục Sinh”
by NGUYỄN NGUYỄN THANH*

This evening I searched my way to God’s range
Where they were celebrating Easter, his morale.
There I found the one familiar but now strange:
That was you who had strayed into the chorale.

We did not recognize one another at this hour:
Everything God had reserved the right to oversee.
Your ventricles were saturated in God’s power,
Not a tiny cavity in your heart was saved for me.

I waited for you at the gate in front of the church
With a glimmer of my hope I kindled a candle;
But you had already dissolved in the lambs herd;
I returned into the night my loneliness to handle.

God has taught his disciples: thou open thy heart
To love thy fellow humans all to live in chime.
Well, my heart is able only to love her, how tart!
Oh Lord, but does she love me right at this time?

Jesus was resurrected, and you were too tonight.
I wondered if tomorrow, to revert, you would deem
To recognize in life, with vicissitudes though trite,
One another, ourselves, after the paradise dream?

Translation by THANH-THANH

SINGING THE OLD SONG

*Original “Lâu Lâu Hát Lại Bài Ca Cũ”
by NGUYỄN PHÚC SÔNG HƯƠNG*

I still miss and sing the old song time and again;
Seeing my country like this I suddenly laugh and cry
in pain.

I think of the national flag in the front line to stand
When I still kneeled setting hopes on, oh homeland!

That song sounded like rising storms with its beat
So sublime and flaming my fervor to heat.
Waves in green fatigues under the flag spirit-in-flesh
Used their blood to write history which is yet fresh.

Accustomed to sleeps alongside brooks as a bet
Many a time they ran dry, we had to lick our sweat.
Just for that because the lyrics like a sharp sword
Penetrated our heart, touching the right chord.

In those days, stones soft, feet firm, as of renown,
Despite casualties all obstacles we trampled down;
Riding the chargers we were to fight the malign swine
For our country to bathe in the moonlight so fine.

Who could guess I would bitterly cry this day
Looking around for my fatherland already far away.
Thru the tea flavor I reminisce about my native place,
Reading the Declaration of Independence: such grace!

Alas! Only the former political prisoners as I
Often sing the old song to swallow sorrow and sigh.
Where are rivers and mountains, my dearest of all?
All my life I am ready to respond to your sacred call!

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE DAYS DAD GOT IMPRISONED

*Original “Con Nhớ Ngày Cha Đi Tù”
by NGUYỄN THỊ BÍCH NGỌC*

How harrowing were the days Dad got imprisoned:
 Mom could hardly sleep, got her eyes wet, rings
 wizenened.
 Gnawing the tiny rootstock Mom spared for me: how sad!
 I was so hungry, Dad!

The cow feces I bore on my head across the river,
Wetted, dripped from the basket, salted my lips.
The heartless stream was still flowing to make me
shiver.

Oh Dad! such storms had risen to break life into chips.

After the flood, Mom dried the damp hay nearly kaput;
Humping her back, she carried on either slender
shoulder

The burden of family responsibility, bareheaded,
barefoot;
She staggered, listlessly calling for Dad, the
householder...

Months had thus slipped away, and years gone by;
Mom still hid and rested her life in thatch, straw and
slime.

I concealed my youth in such sadness as the immense sky,
Shouldering my days struggling to drain the sea of time.

Translation by THANH-THANH

INSPIRED BY THE WIND

*Original "Con Gió"**by NGUYỄN VĂN CƯỜNG*

The wind blew up your long dress lap
After school against your body full of sap:
Returned home, I got sick many a night.

The white cloth stuck on your breast tight
Much thinner than the pall of a stray rain:
Back home, I stayed in bed and in pain
Enduring a fever many and many a day.

In the pagoda each time I heard you pray
To the Buddha, and the sutras deployed,
I thought I had already Nirvana enjoyed.

And at last the evening you were married
Into peace of mind I got the toast carried.

But, that time, feeding your baby blest,
I caught sight of you, with all bare breast:
I felt my body in feverish ripples buried...

Translation by THANH-THANH

YOUR EYES, AN AUTUMN LAKE

*Original “Mắt Biếc Hồ Thu”
by NGUYỄN XUÂN VINH*

Your nice eyes look like an autumn lake,
Your sweet voice lulls me in love to partake.
I wish there only were the two of us
Although not only we two to yearn for thus:

That night, while looking up at each star,
I dreamed of, together with you, traveling afar.
But, admiring your deep eyes, the lake of fall,
Our long trip dream of that time I forgot all.

With the wind through the window prolonged
I recall your eyes for which those days I longed.
How the ways of life have seemed desolate:
As I go farther my missing you is to escalate.

In this place there are enough mountains, hills,
And the blue sky, the small spring, the gills.
You sit by the blind, your hair hangs down;
This is the poem I just wrote for you as a crown.

Translation by THANH-THANH

MY MOTHER

*Original “Mẹ Tôi”
by NHƯ HOA*

When I was just a six-year-old boy
I began playing soccer to enjoy
With a ball of rags my Mother sewed around
A green pomelo picked from the rear ground.
I indulged in the matches forgetting to eat
Causing my Mother to chide, nearly to beat.

When I just reached the age of sixteen
I was already on the dating scene.
I neglected my lessons and to learn
Leading my Mother to sadness and concern
That my future would be inferior to my peers.

When I grew up to twenty years
My country was in danger, I joined the army.
This position was not deemed balmy
But dangerous and made my Mother fear
The loss of Her only begotten son so dear.

My unit was stationed all year far away
I had no home leave even half a day.
It pained my Mother again and again to regard
My trying conditions which were so hard:
Exposed to arrows and bullets, who knows?

After surviving many deadly blows
I obtained permission. But, used to roaming
I went with friends on carousing and foaming
And only came home late at night
Allowing myself little time within Her sight.
My Mother asked why. Fearing She was riled
I kissed Her on the forehead, and smiled.

The fortune of the country turned ill
From bad to worse against my strong will
I became a POW – My Mother had no help.
She loved me, missed me, but did not yelp.
I heard the sad news six months late
After She had pined away to fate.
I could not hold back and burst into tears
I felt my heart broken for all my life's years.

During my days in the enemy's jail
How I wished I could hear You rail!
How I craved for Your anger at me! And
How I longed for Your forever tender hand,
Your lullaby to help my best natured soul,
Leading me into life, guiding me toward a goal!
Those are now all gone! What grievous smother
Oh, my dear Mother!

Translation by THANH-THANH

THIS PLACE TO MISS AND LOVE

*Original “Nơi Đây Để Nhớ và Thương”
by NHƯ HOA*

On my departure, I left behind this native land
With old streets my thin image's imprint to bear
In the solitary evening the sun had just gone bland
And perfumes faded on the lone boulevards there.

The flamboyant bloom signaled time of separation;
The cicadas' sounds seemed to sing good-bye.
Handing me the half-opened flower in intimation
The schoolgirl nestled closer to her teacher to cry.

On my departure, did the clouds and water schlep?
The Rach Ong girl's laughter resonate whenever?
Would the Y-shaped Bridge shake under her step?
The Tan Quy scenery remained attached forever.

Which of my friends stood silent and lonely?
I suddenly felt cold through my spine and my life
With my heavy heart in the windy evening only,
The first rain in the last day made me wakerife.

On my departure, my soul was filled with dejection;
The coffeehouse young lovers would desert fain.
The red jasmine flower sweetly smelled affection;
I dreamed of meeting my loved ones soon again.

On my departure, I left this homeland behind
With the beloved and missed indigo-clad and slim.
Those old connections to me will always be a bind;
In the far-off place my memory none can ever dim.

Translation by THANH-THANH

GLORIFYING OUR BRILLIANT NATIONAL STARS

*Original “Vinh Danh Những Vì Sao Đất Nước”
by PHẠM HOÀI VIỆT*

Black April arouses our infinite resentment,
Our Country has been mourning since the endgame,
But it revives our memories of our immortal heroes...
Nam, Phu, Vy, Hung, Hai, Can — What fame !

At the execution stake, he kept his words firm:
“I want to behold my Motherland before departing Her!”
He refused the blindfold, the three-headed striped Tiger,
Ho Ngoc Can’s eminent glory, nothing can ever blur.

As Ranger Commander, Training Chief, Staff Officer,
Then Combat Leader, Tran Van Hai evaded shame.
He chose death since the Great Cause had declined,
But for his integrity and valor History retains his name.

Let us bow farewell to gallant Nguyen Khoa Nam,
The Lion of the West killed himself as his bulwark fell.
The fired shots resounded in place of warriors' oath
Shaking the ground, frightening the foes as well.

Binh-Long and An-Loc, the two Le family Victors,
Set for their men encouraging examples of resistance.
Nguyen Vy, Van Hung, the renowned of the century,
Had their sagas noted for their monumental existence.

How we regret Pham Van Phu of Kontum, Pleiku...
Strong minded through so many an impossible mission
Not to let himself get captured again by the brigands;
He took a dose of poison to voice his steady position.

May the Sacred Spirit of our Homeland welcome
These and other heroes' noble souls to the Holy Hall.
Let us by the millions in Black April, in deep mourning,
Light our heart's incense to commemorate them all.

Translation by THANH THANH

MY REPATRIATION DREAM

*Original “Giấc Mơ Hồi Hương”
by PHẠM HOÀI VIỆT*

On my way back home a beautiful morning
I bid farewell to the friendly temporary residence.
Eyes swimming with tears, happiness mixed with grief:
This is Vietnam! as ricefields, areca groves evidence.

Since the traitors won, there has been imprisonment,
Starvation, untreated illnesses, with bereavement
imbued,
Heavy taxation, labor extortion, production abuse,
Resources overexploitation, natural calamities ensued.

I find my way back home after the great changes
To our dear Quang Nam painfully shedding tears.
Falling down, then rising up — so many generations:
Green shoots trees sprout, mutual devotion million years.

Hoi An, Dien Ban, Thanh Quyt, Cau Lau,
How I love you, native land that war ravaged day after
day:
Bui Giang's poems resonating somewhere around;
Mom's back bent to wait, Dad's bamboo cane noble to
stay.

I get back to recollect the past days, when I stood
Sobbing under the red flamboyant flowers,
There the hall's veranda turned deserted in summer.
Where are those schoolmates in Tran Quy Cap's
bowers?

The relics — Confucian Monument, Bridge Pagoda —
Are still here, though faded by evil sun and winds so rife.
Beloved Quang Nam! I cherish and miss you for ever!
Let me entrust to you the rest of my life...

Translation by THANH-THANH

COFFEE AND YOU

*Original “Cà Phê và Em”
by PHẠM HỒNG ĐẬM*

Awaking in the morning I smell a fragrant flavor;
I stir and stir in the dark tumbler my day so trite.
It is not a bit of sugar that makes my lips luscious,
But your words so charming and smile so bright.

Beside the bitter odor, I suddenly open my eyes,
Sense time seething thru the boiling of the kettle.
I pour my soul into the coffee-pot
And hear life drip down each drop in fine fettle.

I am aware your love is so passionate;
In times of solitude I can find ready your care.
Life's cup does not savor by itself sweet scent;
It is delicious owing to your hands that prepare.

Let us return contention to the narrow streets;
We keep for our lives just a private corner so fair.

Each morning begins with that familiar taste,
And that whole day begins with your love.
I drink sip by sip the mundane vicissitudes:
Coffee — and you, in my heart, my dear dove.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE FLOOD

*Original “Nước Lụt”
by PHẠM HỒNG ĐẬM*

The water-lily stalks stretch along the stream.
The poles are also long to punt the boat,
The yellow cork flowers rock with the waves;
You are anxious on your way home to float.

You return there during the flood, who knows?
How can I then find out that river shore?
The tide rises up to overspread distress,
Making humans wade across it bearing bore.

Your home faces the swallows' cave,
Waiting in the evening for people out of sight.
A tardy egret, looking for a perching space,
Discovers only water, clouds, and twilight.

Birds have to quit the plains for the forest,
Ants gather in swarms to build nests at height.
You shall reposition your old bamboo bed,
Lying on it to hear the waves rustle all night.

My upstream boat leaves the deserted bank,
The northeastern wind hurries a piercing cold.
There is tonight this guy out here in the frost,
Yearning for a safe place back in a household.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE BLIND CHILD

Original “Em Bé Mù”

by PHẠM THƯƠNG HỢP

Where have you come from, poor creature?
Emaciated and ragged is the most striking feature!

With hoarse voice your songs sound without hope;
With your shaking stick your way on you grope.

Within your reach is the vacant pitch dark;
Your begging murmur shows the suffering mark
Beside human forms similar to statues carved.

Oh my God! Who would read
You have since long starved?

Who would pay heed
To your heart-breaking cry?
As you are indifferently looked at by passers-by...

Translation by THANH-THANH

SUNSHINE IN THE HONGKONG FORBIDDEN CAMP

*Original “Nắng Trong Trại Cấm Hồng-Kông”
by PHẠM TRUNG THÀNH*

The sunshine is cavorting around, in its play
With wind and clouds: what freedom composition!
I feast my eyes upon each innocent beam, ray,
Like a round eye wide open on the leafy partition.

Oh, how much I cherish that summer sunshine?
As I am quite a lot fond of the leaves on the trees;
I also love the sweet wind and to see it run fine
Like the white clouds softly floating in the breeze.

But the Hongkong sunshine, to me, is not nice
Especially to all of boat people here these crowds.
Poor sunshine! It cannot get of the cake any slice:
Locked in, with us, it enjoys no wind and clouds.

I catch to fondle in each caring though little hand
Each jot of sunshine, like me, the fences cramp.
To await a tomorrow, I will together with it stand,
To take dear sunshine out of this forbidden camp.

1989*

Translation by THANH-THANH

**the author was then 10 years old.*

NEW CENTURY'S EVE

*Original “Đêm Sang Thế Kỷ”
by QUYÊN TÂM*

This night is as long as many centuries!
The Seine River sluggish in the starlight.
The Alma Bridge reminds of the Lady's fate:
Not long ago young Diana died that night.

The Paris Metro is a hundred years old
Under the riverbed to defy nature's law.
The impressive Alps constitute two regions,
But nearer the two areas tunnels do draw.

There is the cold sea to separate two parts,
France and England each was a lone mass.
Old communications were only by ships,
Now there's a way thru the Channel to pass.

There are airplanes to travel peacefully
Over wide oceans, around our vast globe;
Spacecrafts to explore the cosmic expanses;
And genetics into genes' structure to probe.

Since humans have come closer in ties,
Shall they love, or fight one another more?
Shall countries, once less differentiated,
Live in peace and cooperation — or at war?

Sublime is amity, but wicked is hatred:
Why nurture, cherish it deep in your mind?
Care more for the others! People's wish
Is harmony, while rancor is a selfish kind!

Let us fathom our innermost with altruism
Using friendship to abolish each strife.
Be this not a mere eternal dreamy vision
But humanity's need to live a worthy life!

In good faith our hearts are full of hope.
May the miraculous light man's soul enthrall.
The apt way is so ablaze, let us not stray.
What wonder, lofty sentiments embrace all!

Translation by THANH-THANH

FROM THIS

*Original “Từ Đây”
by SONG NHỊ*

I stand here and look at your residing place
Through a full-of-clouds-and-sunshine space.
Quiet are lines of trees and mild the sun spread;
Half-way clouds hang down and more moved I get.

I stand here and gaze upon the zone you abide
Over barbed wires and stony walls that divide.
Quite a lot of life sights very familiar but unusual
Occur every morning and evening repeatedly dual.

I stand here and observe our dear former abode
Some hundreds of kilometers hence apart a road.
Memories of those days are numerous to treasure
And countless to miss and love you to my pleasure.

I stand here today to look back on the ancient times
Reaching to bygone dates, rushing to old climes.
A universe of muse, a sky of starlight you did bring
Perfumes and flowers manyfold the spirit of spring.

I stand here today to think of the past and hate
The vicissitudes as our country and people's fate.
What a pity lonely you are spending every night!
I promise to reunite with you when ends this plight.

I stand here today to look forward to tomorrow
Nurturing dreams about our future free from sorrow.
There are our Happiness, Motherland, Love, Life,
And for hereafter so many plans, so much to strive.

Translation by THANH-THANH

A SUMMER DAY IN SAN FRANCISCO

*Original “Một Ngày Mùa Hạ ở San Francisco”
by SONG NHỊ*

I arrived in San Francisco at noon
on a day dark similar to nightfall.
The slopes hazed far above with fog;
People crowded like in a festive mall.

The distant sea surface was dim;
the petrels inclined their wings still;
the sails glided past one after another;
the breeze brought a breath of chill.

From this side of the straits,
I looked at the other along each span
and felt as if the suspended bridge
still retained the spirit of a gone man.

Oh, Strauss^{*}, the old engineer!
Your heart and mind being so sublime
with marvelous lines in your design
have and will still live through time.

I got to San Francisco on the winding
and sloping streets with pleasure;
Like the transversely crawling crabs,
the line of vehicles rounded at leisure.

Going downwards then back upwards
around in four and each way trend,
the horizontal and vertical roads
drifted up and down as if waves bend.

The rows of houses one upon another
heaping up round the mountain side:
whose hands were so skillful to create?
what masterpiece did nature to us confide?

I entered San Francisco City
feeling tears in my eyes suddenly start;
I gazed far over the Pacific Ocean
and suffered pain in my deep heart...

Translation by THANH-THANH

**Joseph B. Strauss, the engineer who designed and built the
Golden Gate Bridge, one of the seven wonders of the world.*

THE MIGRANTS' SONG

Original "Tiếng Hát Loài Chim Di"
by SONG NHỊ

1.

Oh flocks of birds over the withered woods that fly
and hordes of horses that waver in the fields so dry!
Wake up right now and from now on, you all,
to listen to this passionate song and pressing call!

Continue to advance, be strong,
all of a day long,
even a month to be bound,
a year round,
or a whole life!

A life with strife
between vital breath
and death
without end.

Take away with you what still needs to mend!
Go forwards on the infinite way!
What will be completed to repay?
a pleasure to gain:
how much pain!

2.

Oh our heart, rose-bud,
eternally with red blood
and with love for ever,
why through a century, howsoever,
in our fatherland so many a tribulation,
in our motherland so much degradation,
there have been sufferers and treacherous!

3.

Oh our affectionate, precious,
thousand and thousand times dear,
the great change has pulverized our human sphere!
Time elapsed has not sufficiently dimmed our past,
thus our hearts still have million words to say,
in our feelings limitless loving things still stay.
Within our never-ending thrill,
send our minds onto the top of the winter chill,
drink emptying the morning dew in the cold sky!

4.

If we keep silent as an acceptance to abide by,
if our moves are conceived as a fate,
then what is helpful to debate,
so that all life we can never subside our sorrow
but just add difficulties to our plans for tomorrow!

5.

Well, let us drink,
drain to the dregs the grief and gloom in our think!
Let us visualize the time of our return
albeit a supposition as we yearn,
a dream, whatever.
Let us just temporarily bury dolor in endeavor
in order to love one another more than ever.

6.

The jungle trees will awake in the bright dome
of the sky, the migratory birds will flap back home.
Our days will come and the sun will rise to blaze
Oh humankind, hurry up to get up from the maze!

Translation by THANH-THANH

HOMESICK AND NOSTALGIC FOREVER

*Original “Thương Nhớ Đầy Vơi”
by SON TRUNG*

Missing and longing for my motherland how I smart!
It feels like a swift current running in my heart.
Apparently like kites flying in the warm sunny sky,
But it's a rainy, windy night with storm to intensify!

The grief is immense, compassion for a firmament,
On that far-away native soil of love permanent.
I remember the still river, the old watering place,
The past paddy-fields in the moonlit wide space.

Dazed with melancholy, with memories lifelong,
Old friends, a time of joyful amusing singsong,
The green years' school roofs, the fresh stream,
The small path that forks to multiple sites to seem.

For them, for those, eternal yearning, endless plea,
Mine is like a big boat sail missing the vast sea.
The days have flown away with winds and dew
I feel as if a big mountain is blocking my view.

Always missing and longing for, without cease,
All my heart is forever righteous never to decrease.
The golden crane has not got back once flew away,
The white clouds are still over there, day after day!

Translation by THANH-THANH

WAFING OLD PERFUME

*Original “Thoảng Chút Hương Xưa”
by SƯƠNG MAI*

Back I came. The wind moved the orchid lightly,
And the rain fell faintly as illusive as nightly.
I was back. There wafted the perfume of old,
In that repercussion remained a longing to hold.

I came back, to check if that river did cause
Upon its stream of lovesickness any boat to pause.
Back to that dim distance, our old country found,
I welcomed the moon, the hesitant autumn sound.

Back, and my heart suddenly felt tears flowing,
In the mist and smoke poetic inspiration showing.
I had come back as if in a dream hard to believe
With the image of someone still to wait, to grieve.

Two decades had since elapsed: late, this dove?
Alas! Twenty years long sufficed to ruin our love.

Translation by THANH-THANH

LOVE POEM FOR HUÉ

*Original “Thơ Tình Cho Huế”
by THÁI TÚ HẠP*

Back to Hué! The green leaves on the dreamy way
suddenly seemed to set the sun in my soul to sway;
since that early in the morning a certain bird
has made various vague tunes in my heart heard.

You came home. Steps resound in the small alley,
light smoke skim along in the Imperial Citadel pally.
Though stony, I become so surprisingly upset
as the once I wondered if I had lost my self yet.

The River of Perfumes gets nostalgic in fall;
Its fog and flowers make your sad air enthrall;
that stream of youth’s hair is source of eternal love;
you still are always a kind of naive dreamlike dove.

Over the eyes of that Hué morose ancient shrine
I, the nomad, to brush with a kiss did once incline;
the Sacred Lady's dodder caught my affection to fill
like a light evening breeze on the Huong Tra Hill.

You have got home, and I aged with so long to miss,
Oh Royal Capital, coaches and horses of old bliss!
I feel I reel with send-off spirits on the parting plate:
Is this the only bitter remainder of my thus bitter fate?

Translation by THANH-THANH

AUTUMNAL LOVE IN HIGHLAND

*Original “Tình Thu Trên Cao”
by THÁI TÚ HẠP*

Dalat gave me many misty afternoons there
in the streets to feel the early autumn air
high above dull spread the hazy sunshine
and realms of heavens also seemed to pine

Oh Dalat, autumn had attached me to you
and just kindled in my muse the dreamy hue
imbued willows in blue, your hair in romance
and the legendary moon in a shade of trance

Was it that you brought here the Hanoi fall
dawn dews over thin shoulders like a shawl
so that in gazing at the azure I could delight
thousand years to long for the birds' flight

Dalat gave me the autumnal separation
your song sent me along with my migration
with promises so many, nostalgia so much
to see off and miss this warrior the nonesuch

Translation by THANH-THANH

WINTER IN THE UPPER PEACEFUL SPHERE

*Original “Mùa Đông Trên Chốn An Bình”
by THÁI TÚ HẠP*

Man's true heart always stays in the eternal cavern clear,
No foreign continent can delude the Oriental sphere.
There will be a day we return, as the river wakes up,
Lean on bamboo canes to calmly admire fatherland dear.

The long range of mountains opens, the moon welcomes,
In the thatched cottage of aplomb remain the loyal
chums.

You tender honey through the Sun and the Moon time
Had to go adrift unaware of where since the era of scums!

We have been longing for a permanent spring of life,
The horses repent, in the pastures surrender their strife.
The melancholic aloe wood in infatuated forests shakes,
The sunlight warms fragrant yellow apricots wakerife.

In the green monastery thousand pages of history cream
Tell us the million-year spring filled with a peaceful
dream:
Only the lower earthly place gets transformed in grief,
Humans come and go, within limits their footprints teem.

In our innermost we nurture the migrating birds' plight
Craving for their singing back on the high hills in
delight.
Our staunch souls perfumed with white lotus scent,
Oh universe! our love of native land is so deep and
bright!

As we put out the fire, we end all myriad of abjection;
Tolerance concepts rise with the sunshine to perfection.
Do you hear the Spring that has just begun to exist
In each of our hearts like wonderful flowers of affection?

Translation by THANH-THANH

BELOVED FARAWAY
DA-NANG QUANG-NAM

*Original “Quảng Đà Ngàn Dặm Dấu Yêu”
by THÁI TÚ HẠP*

How I fret with memories this evening in exile
of my native soil, Da Nang — Hoi An polychrome:
Duy Xuyen sunlight like golden silk on bamboo gates,
yellow mums dazed with longing on your way home,

dreamy cranes hovering over the Que Tien Spring,
bewildered fawns under the Dai Binh moonlit shroud,
where I once came back to revisit Trung Phuoc
contemplating autumn fade like each sad cloud,

the sun appealing friends to Tuy Loan to have dates,
flowers flying on Ai Nghia Road in the green days,
and do you still remember this adventurous bird
on the Son Cha top, how lovable the Tra Mi fays?

the Ngu Hanh Mountains seeming forever meditative,
the Han River sound always worriedly awaiting alone,
the Phuoc Kien Pagoda bell beating in calm evenings,
and my mother grieving under that roof moss-grown,

the illustrious victories recorded in historical books,
our ancestors' flame of struggle handed down to all,
between heaven-and-earth sparkling our poor land,
the vicissitudes of life, taking it in turns rise and fall.

nursing abstract dreams resignedly as an expatriate
I suddenly miss Quang Nam kin so much adore,
alongside the Thu River waits impatiently Giao Thuy,
gratitude to Da Dung — Hon Kem I always store.

Oh Da Nang! I will return from this faraway abode,
wild horse confined, from long trips to be immune,
lighting candles to illuminate the old historic feats,
finding sense in Hoi An birth place in the full moon.

The universe is infinite but my heart is limited,
Here is my constant loyalty to my Country just right.
I have got you, Mountains and Rivers affectionate
As the sun trees and fruits would cherish in delight.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE SEVENTH MONTH

Original “Tháng Bảy”
by THẢO NGUYỄN

The Lunar Seventh Month is already back!
The two lovers may meet for only one night!
The Milky Way’s Bridge suddenly sinks away
Leaving behind rain and tears in a pitiful plight?

In the Seventh Month with pleasing prayers
Where have gone the deceased dear?
Are they still in the earth’s womb, the Hades,
Or freed as the fall leaves into the atmosphere?

In the Seventh Month, how piteous the leaves
Which were so green as not thought to change
But then turn purple by a few rain drops
And the purple fades as the elements disarrange.

In the Seventh Month I go out to seek a bit
Of rose sunlight as to follow the birds' flight;
There over the mountaintop a curtain of mist:
I am afraid to be obliterated in the cloudy sight!

In the Seventh Month, oh honey! a whisper...
But any word only means just my heart to wring.
Why could that not be so smooth as a breeze
Very soft, very sweet as the coming of spring.

Translation by THANH-THANH

MESSAGE TO MISERY

Published in "Prison Poems"

(Paris: International Buddhist Information Bureau, 2007)

Original "Nhấn Nhủ Khổ Đau"

by Abbot THÍCH QUẢNG ĐỘ

Hey! Pain!

Do not menace me again!

I have known you too well! Enough!

I have met you on all my life's roads rough;
and each time I meet you anywhere,

I always smile a smile so fair

and look you straight in the face without dread.

Although you really are more awesome than Death,
with me, you are nothing at all.

Do not fancy it, that I fear you, to befall

so that I should damp my righteous zest

to lower my head before you, inhuman pest!

Do continue to persecute me to carry out your plan:

I have pledged not to regret my illusionary life span.

Oh, Distress!

Do you hear among the world's moving stream
the swift waves of impermanence's scream?

Do not pride yourself being unduly victorious
on the corpses of humans unfortunate but
meritorious!

For, grossly stupid and coarse,

you know nothing besides your force,

and then you laugh at devastation and ruin.

The music you listen to is lament, bewail, chagrin!
the tea you taste teardrops of the wretch,
the wine you sip fresh blood of your victims' fetch,
each curtain you hang like many a mourning
headband
of writhing people you trample down and brand!
Poverty and starvation follow each of your steps,
chains and shackles where you come it schleps;
sunshine becomes obscurity
to cover with darkness all paths to futurity;
the naive foetuses, unborn babies, cherubs,
get aborted by you using overpopulation as cover-ups.

Oh, Agony!
Do you hear the complaints against your savagery
that are resounding from cities to the countryside,
from islands to mountainous areas nationwide,
and from graves by souls of victims of gross
injustice?

Are you aware? that on the earth's surface
there will be nowhere
in the deep sea as well as in the thin air
for you to find a long-term shelter thither to scoot
to escape, when is duly ripe every fruit!
And that day will definitely come as in a daze
when humanity awakes from this current maze.

Vu Doai Village* on the Buddha's Birthday in 1982.
**where he had been sent into internal exile under house arrest
 for 10 years.*

Translation by THANH-THANH

I MISS YOU IN THE YELLOW FALL

*Original “Nhớ Chị Trong Mùa Thu Lá Vàng”
by THU MINH*

A yellow leaf – or, is it a butterfly? –
Has alighted on my shoulder this autumn morn.
I am going back, by myself, to the old path
And my remembrance dispels the haze lorn.

Pitying me, separated from the cosy abode,
You passed long distances to visit me here:
You represent our country – Ha Noi City –
Lotus tea, green rice flavor – our love so dear.

In the shimmering afternoon sun, you combed
Your hair that fluttered – the light girlish strand.
Thru the doorframe, I sat contemplating you,
So heart-warming as back in our homeland.

You came – those days just grew yellowish;
Now, fall has dropped dead leaves all around.
Missing you, even the river flow is desolate:
Then there, now far-away – just to confound.

Time spreads yellow leaves on every side;
Thinking of you I feel by sadness seared.
How I remember – in the clear moonlight
Being beside you, sister, my very endeared!

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE LATE ROSE

*Original “Bông Hồng Nở Muộn”
by THU MINH*

The late rose,
Glowing with sun tints, making pink lips tipsy,
This afternoon to open finally chose.

Thrown into dizzy,
I stand at the gate — so strange! — to note
That clouds over the streets do float and float.

I catch sight, quickly:
The dew shakes a white dress — which chum?
Oh, no!... Springtime has here so long come.

Unintentionally
My hair has grown gray
Together with time that passes fast away.
 Where will the rose resettle
 Of its each petal!

Translation by THANH-THANH

ME AND THE SEA

*Original “Tôi và Biển”
by THU MINH*

Today, though, I became a stranger to the sea:
As a stopping-off sightseer, it didn't know me.
Over there, heaving sails were going far-away,
And down there, ripples whispering in calm play.

This scenery was so quiet that I wondered why
Only myself was to face the sea and the sky.
Only myself face-to-face with life had to deal:
Even each little wish faded out, in pain to feel.

Why the sea was in a peaceful state, yet, while
I felt my heart a whole of fire screaming isle
To burn into thin air all of my dreams and hope
So that along a restless life my way I'd grope,
Fragile like a butterfly's wing. Prospect: nope!

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE WONDER OF MOM

*Original “Kỳ Quan Mẹ”
(and set to music) by THUY LAM SYNH*

Here in this world, there're lots of wonders
There are lots of wonders
But the nice one still is our Mom
Our Mom is: the finest wonder
Here in this world Mom is the wonder

Sister, sit down here! Brother, open arms
Hug Mom heartily, kiss Mom ardently
Do not wait until Mom leaves
Mom parts with our arms, we are so sorry
Here in this world there is nothing
If Mom has gone, Mom gone forever

We've got our lives owing to Mom giving birth
Mom gave birth and Mom brought us up
Merit's immense, enormous
All our lives we can't repay Mom

Translation by THANH-THANH

SUFFERING

9-11-2001

*Original “Tang Throng”**by TỊNH NHƯ*

On that Tuesday morning
The sky was blue and the sun yellow,
Autumn had just begun,
All living beings were each a fellow.

Suddenly the two buildings collapsed
In a space of nihility,
The capital fell into stun
By the inhuman manslayers’ ability.

Thousands of lives seized with grief
In the immense sea of fire
Without a last will
Or a complaint, without ire!

Children bereaved of parents in panic,
Wives deprived of husbands in pain,
Grooms gave up brides in bitterness,
Brothers and sisters lost siblings in bane.

Sufferings rushed in repeatedly,
With tears, bones and blood,
Thousands of humans extirpated,
Wrath rose throughout America in flood.

In this dutiful and loyal seventh month
When Buddha absolves the guilty dead,
Why to the innocent people
They had the heart distress to spread!

I implore the Almighty to bless mankind
To live safe and sound in whole,
Especially of the recently perished,
Save and free from suffering each soul.

Lunar Seventh Month 2001

Translation by THANH-THANH

SHANNON

Original "Shannon"
by TRÂM TU MẶC

Hello, Shannon!
I gave you a brief salute,
With great pleasure when seeing you pass on.

Hi, Shannon!
I greeted you again on route,
And you looked back! Eagerly your eyes shone!

Hey, my young friend, at that age so green,
Arising in your mind what images have been?
The refined talent, youth,
Or the elderly, kind-hearted in truth,
Which one has talked of love with a good grace?

Each time you came to this place,
I held your sweet-smelling hand at it to aim,
I kissed it, why your face grew red with shame?
You blinked, your eyelashes up curved,
I looked at you and how I felt my heart stirred.

You are innocent at the tender age,
Twenty years old, life is at its blossoming stage.
Your wet lips appear to sexually excite,
Your graceful figure, hung hair seem to invite.
Oh your streamed golden hair with girlhood scent,
Once more I also stroked it, a natural bent.

Well Shannon, our acquaintance how did we make?
The first time, a brief greeting for courtesy's sake,
And you replied with words so nice,
Took a pen from the briefcase, and wrote concise
But clear quickly two words Dieu-Shannon so cute
The schoolgirl handwriting, what a pleasing beaut!

I have in my life fallen in love so many a time,
And so many a nymph have plagued my prime.
I have often suffered the suffering of sand too,
How many heels have trampled upon it to pass, ooh!

Now that I painfully recognize my advanced age,
I desolately try to dispel your obsessive image.
Then, Shannon, my young little friend!
Please do not resent.
You are an angel, but I only am an evil spirit!

And after office hours yesterday – I knew it,
You were trying to await me,
But I tried to stay at work longer as if carefree.
Casting a furtive glance, I felt sorry so much;
The fruit is ripe, why I coldly declined to touch?
No, I implore you, do not wait on!

That evening I lay still and could not sleep as such,
I dreamed, I whispered your name, my icon:
Shannon!

Translation by THANH-THANH

MY LIFE FOR MY MOM'S LAUGHTER

Original "Đổi Cả Thiên Thu Tiếng Mẹ Cười"
by TRẦN TRUNG ĐẠO

Picking up the handset I was stunned with surprise:
Whose voice as light as falling leaves in cold skies?
Isn't it ten years, ten odd years, dear mother,
Just in silence to miss and long for one another?

I left without any promises or pledges that day:
The old wild horse from its forest-land went astray.
Ten years for Mom's hair to turn mourning white,
And mourning-like my soul also in such a plight.

You've still been sitting there weaving your pain
By an existence of slapping wind and beating rain.
I've set off to set up from all directions a pyre
In order to disperse the mist for life lighting a fire.

Your voice was broken off, you choked up, I found;
Mom's endearing words or mere in-reverie sound?
You are too far, how could I reach out for you?
And when could we meeting again look forward to?

Do not cry, my dear mother, and continue to await.
All my grief I will hide in the rhymes I create.
Of all my sorrow I will write reams and reams,
And find your warmth my warmth in my dreams.

As I picked up the handset how astounded was I
To hear my Mom's voice sadder than the rainy sky!
Should I be able to give up Man's time in hereafter,
I would offer mine to recover my Mom's laughter.

Translation by THANH-THANH

POETRY, THESE FOUR PARAGRAPHS?

*Original “Bốn Đoạn Đây Là Thơ Phải Không?”
by TRẦN VĂN LỄ*

One day, too heartsick, I got to the beach;
Under the willows, I gazed at the sea and the air.
There loomed a beautiful girl
Like an Western young lady with blond hair.
She flew over the surf
As a boat that floated with its sail so bare
Like so many boats while deserting their country
Continuing to float on the vast ocean in despair...

I was so sad that I heard myself weeping;
The waves so pitied me they choked their sound.
I wanted to write a poem but unable;
I let my soul soar high by the wind bound.
Up at the height I met the clouds over there,
Looking down – Oh, how the sea was profound:
It was still there, why people had passed away!
Now there then nowhere, as Buddha did expound.

I felt melancholy (there was deep grief
Before that and after that), I did not know why.
Sheltering in the shade I sensed my soul cold;
My heart broke like frost under the warm sky.
Was that girl actually a ghost that appeared
To lead me back to my old country on the sly
To visit the pieces of those boats that drifted
Over to the foot of the willows mossy there to lie?

One day... it has been ten years ago, then it was
Into eternity... one human being, once and for all
And not only one but thousands, millions:
How dismal my Fatherland, you heard my call?
Were branches gentle, why birds did not perch
While tigers might be friendly with men not gall?
What has it stood for, that regime?
Why I could not hold back, but let my tears fall!

One day... I took my pen. And I wrote
The four paragraphs above, poetry was it withal?

Translation by THANH-THANH

I F

*Original “Nếu”
by TRỌNG LÊ*

If you were white snow
I would beg to be wintertime
In the immense universe
To warm each other in the cold clime.

If you were a meadow
I would become a sweet stream
To water the prairie
Against each summer sunbeam.

If you were a brook
That provides me with fresh source
I would love you passionately
Through all vicissitudes' course.

If you were the railroad
I would be the night train
On the long infinite path
To pierce the silent night domain.

If your teeth were an ivory comb
I would stop my last venturous stride
To have you do my hair
From morning until eventide.

If your lips were a bitter fruit
I would volunteer to taste the tart;
If you were the warm wine
I would drink it with my whole heart.

I love you the eternal love
Never ever to degenerate
During this subsistence on earth
And thousand future lives of my fate.

Love although vinegary
Has its excited flavor's prime:
More to taste, more to get infatuated
Until total oblivion of time.

If you were the bridge
To tie the North to the South section
I would be the first traveler
To put my feet on that connection.

If you were the wind
I would make myself a cloud
To fly with the wild birds
Over mountains and forests so proud.

If you were a blank page
I would write a poetic theme
To deepen our love
And enrich our existence as a dream.

If you were life itself
I would get times backwards revolve
To render our love everlasting
In the vast universe to dissolve.

If you were the slight swallow wing
That slants on my days its flight,
It would move my heart
To lighten my nostalgic plight.

If you were a seagull
I would be the big blue;
If you were the stream
I would be the great oceanic hue,
The river, the lake,
The brook, the drop of dew.

Translation by THANH-THANH

TO TRUC LANG, MY FRIEND

Original "Gửi Bạn Trúc Lang"
by THANH-THANH

You and I became friends of youth in the prime
With Ho Dinh Phuong and others, merry to rhyme.
When our country in peril the enemy tried to immerse,
We only had our Whole Heart with valiant verse.

As wartime young men each had with his own to deal
But finally could not turn back the History's wheel.
Who got defeated? Who on the ocean met with fate?
Who stayed home? Who fled abroad? A stalemate!

We in exile are homesick, thinking of our old land,
Having faith in a better Future, we pocket our brand.
With paintings million styles, poetry thousand tunes,
Instead of firearms you embellish life with festoons.

I esteem you, an artist with a versatile talent;
Even if ailing or destitute, you are an inspired gallant.
You tirelessly create for the True, Good, Beautiful:
Gold or brass, a certain souvenir to Life is your pull.

Reading your works I remember Han Mac Tu much,
Sense of Bich Khe some tone, of Nguyen Sa a touch.
Wow! since you have energy, travel freely you can:
Though opinions differ, they are in this Place of Man.

I appreciate your loyalty, devotion to Letters and Arts.
Um! in our existence what is nobler than deep hearts?
In the stream of life still struggling for fair and fine
Truc Lang alone appears imposingly in his own line.

THANH-THANH

FILIAL PIETY

*Original “Công Ôn Sinh Dưỡng”
by TRƯỜNG GIANG*

“Parents’ merits like the sky and the sea always remain,
But children’s repayment is about to boast and
complain.”

That is the abounding habit of behavior so bad:
How such feeling is depressed! How such way is sad!

Who gave birth to you, do you have the heart to forget?
Who brought you up, how can you have neglected as yet?
Fathers’ flesh-and-blood love, one should not ignore.
Of Mothers’ dedication, nobody should think no more.

Nurturance does not naturally care about nescience,
But one ought not to slight any emotional experience:
Since being born, the baby has been quite cherished,
Day and night parents trying to do what they wished.

If children got sick mothers also got gaunt, tense
Through the long night staying awake worried hence
In agonizing anguish day after day crushed by grief:
Such sentimental attachment would you as omit as lief?

And fathers always earnestly expect and try their best
To see their kids progress, of education stand the test,
Pass exams, obtain rolls of honor with names entered in:
Their parents' hope to satisfy and their own end to win.

Your Dads spared no pains round the clock striving
To make a living though burdensome but life-giving
trying
Until they married you off and you left for all quarters
Despite their endless suffering, dear sons and daughters!

Translation by THANH-THANH

VIETNAM WAR MEMORIAL

*Original “Đài Tưởng Niệm”
by TỬ PHONG*

This is the image of American and Vietnamese fighters
Who fought the common enemy side by side
For the cause of Freedom over the world,
Setting a heroic example to last forever with pride.

To prevent the Reds from sowing suffering
And creating dolor, bereavement, yoke, thrall,
Our soldiers died for us to survive.
Could we have the heart to ignore them all?

The initiatives to erect the memorial
To eternally memorize those divine
Are worthy of our honoring, supporting
And contributing to the construction so fine.

To admire the two American and Vietnamese flags
Of Freedom and Democracy proudly fly, how nice!
And the image of American and Vietnamese warriors
Is the symbol of such sublime sacrifice...

Translation by THANH-THANH

INSIDE THE CATHEDRAL

Original "Trong Ngôi Giáo Đường"
by VÂN BIA

The two blocks of seats in the cathedral wide
Divided the believers, separated the lovers too.
Since childhood, the prayers not yet known through,
We had to kneel down on each of the Image's side:
The Savior parted us, on the left me, on the right you.

Time passed fast, pushing us from the first line
Gradually down to the middle rows to sit.
Your hair had grown long, my first love strong wine,
I looked sideways rather than straight at the altar fit.
Sideways in my row there was an angel like a dream:
Even not fervent, I went to church for you, my nice.
If on Sunday I glanced in your direction with a beam
But did not see you there, I felt I had lost Paradise.

Then God took compassion on the two infatuated,
Allowing me to lead up to the pulpit my sprite,
Exchange wedding rings, kneel as to be graduated,
And wish for a forever side-by-side happy life bright.
After that, we got back to the middle row in His light.

Time had not been enough after our such treats
To drive both of us down to the last row of seats,
Back in front of the altar I already had to send you,
In hot tears, in dull spirit and dumb mind, so blue!
Why have you hidden yourself in that coffin, how cold!
Leaving me lonely, pain unable to withhold,
Standing abandoned, got lost in the holy place.

From now on, having my time-worn age to face,
How could I endure my life's remaining days!
In the cathedral I am still used to glance sideways
To wish through dim eyes to see you in the clouds;
And I dream, dream of being soon rid of all shrouds,
I meet you again on leaving the last row of seats.

Translation by THANH-THANH

BARK OF CLOUDS

*Original “Thuyền Mây”
by VÂN HẢI*

Who has brought here dark clouds this afternoon?
 To spread over the young girl's shoulders spare,
 And stick solitude slantingly over her head of hair.
 Who has brought here dark clouds this afternoon?
 Her eyes get tired of the violet horizon scrutinizing
 Where flies a lonely bird she can't help realizing.
 Her hand closes the robe flap of autumn dim dew
 That the wind raises the perfumed incense through.
 Hot tears with cold pain agony causes to impregnate,
 She drifts along with her country's unfortunate fate.
 The roses in her cheeks gradually lose coloration,
 She hesitates her steps sore at the time of separation.
 There he rests, embraced in his dear native soil
 On the devastated fatherland for the enemy to spoil.
 Who is responsible for deaths and dole to betide?
 Leaving her a piteous widow on the windy roadside.
 Who has brought here dark clouds this afternoon?
 To spread over the young girl's shoulders spare,
 And stick solitude slantingly over her head of hair.
 Who has brought here dark clouds this afternoon?

Translation by THANH-THANH

A FAREWELL SONG

*Original “Tống Biệt Hành”
by VI KHUÊ*

I understood you were leaving for the East;
I filled for you this glass of rosy yeast.
The wine would soften your lips, you would cry;
And I laughed – Did you understand why?

I felt as if you were departing for the West;
I served you with this fermented glassful of quest.
The wine would spice your eyes like balm;
And I watched tears dropping into my palm.

It seemed as if you were setting out for the South;
I entrusted to you this brandy to douse the drouth.
The wine would stain your jacket, smirched;
And, from the party, in the moon you lurched.

You made as if you were going to the North;
I have invested in your glass the pearls henceforth.
The wine would bid you “Adieu!” for my sake;
Do not look back at your small bamboo gate!

I gave you the send-off, oh, the parting time!
No winds in woods and clouds in sky could rhyme.
Flowers, let pervade this royal park sweet scent!
It was, indeed, a farewell – my bosom friend!

Translation by THANH-THANH

HEAVENLY LETTER OF APRIL 30*

*Original “Thư Trời 30 Tháng Tư”
by VI KHUÊ*

I sent to you a letter on an April day
At a time I did not know early or late.
On that day it was snowy where you stay
And rainy and windy in your native place.

Homeland, it is yours of old place of birth,
Not mine, but why I missed it without end?
From high I looked down at the earth
And felt in my heart such a deep wrench!

I saw troubles everywhere brought about;
Boats furrowing the waves to save soul;
An interminable trip tried to carry out;
A century elapsing, not reaching the goal.

Goal? where to arrive, how to understand?
Did you raise your eyes in contemplation
And mean to ask me if the shore to land
Were back to the point of embarkation?

How to answer your question on papers?
I looked and only met galaxies to bother
Beaming through hundreds of skyscrapers,
Calling for humans to come to one another.

Translation by THANH-THANH

* April 30, 1975: *The Fall of the US-backed Republic of VN*

THE WHOLE WORLD IS AT PEACE THIS SPRING

*Original “Xuân Nay Thiên Hạ Bình Yên”
by VI KHUÊ*

I have packed off and shall not return at all;
Farewell for ever to the globe, a hand waving.
Future generations, do remember and recall
The mania the world this century pervading!

I shall never and never step back any paces.
Please, the universe, set your mind at ease!
Remove your hands, hide no longer your faces!
For no more corpses shall ever fill the seas!

Bloody battlefields are not any more created.
Behind the Temple of Literature, cosy homes rise.
Two or three old phantoms are also eliminated
For human beings to skin and flesh revitalize.

So be it. Set your mind at rest and let it soar!
Make merry over me who have lost the red heart.
Never from now on and never again shall I roar
For storms to rise in the skies over any part.

Be assuredly at ease this spring, humankind!
You have feasted to see me off. The flowers glow.
All the corners of the earth enjoy peace of mind.
Farewell to you for ever and ever — Moscow!

Translation by THANH-THANH

CONFUCIUS

*Original “Khổng Tử”
by VI KHUÊ*

I call Your name once every day, studious,
And do not know any more words to do
Than innermostly thank You
Confucius

More than two thousand years ago
You placed my ancestors in confinement
within a restraint camp, oh,
full of enticement
in which each John Doe or Jane Doe
felt so great (not a shibboleth)
while every minute, every mo
all breathed the breath
that was
Yours

We
today
do not yearn for more than a state
of confinement that is fine inside to stay
to be sure that we are really great

We
today
have been so base
astray...

Translation by THANH-THANH

*Original “Hoang Tàn”
by VI KHUÊ*

Translation by THANH-THANH

FISH AND ME

Original "Cá và Tôi"
by VI KHUẾ

When I see the graceful yellow fish
Swimming deliberately in the limpid lake to its wish,
I recognize on the spot the wonders of God:
Fish and me, bird, brook, algae, moss, on the nod.

Translation by THANH-THANH

RECALLING NGUYỄN DU

on his way through the Devil's Gate
Original "Nhớ Nguyễn Du"
by VI KHUẾ

In here I sit reading thousands of old book pages;
Out there still echoes the hubbub of wars on the march;
Snow storms against the window-panes, rain rages;
I think of the ancient poet, under the Devil's arch.

Through the Demon's Gate, clouds hung over the kloofs;
He missed his loved ones back in the South miles lying.
Trees agitated by winds, the horse's numbed hooks,
The moon sank on the mount, gibbons kept sighing.

Bored with people's faces he did not want to see,
Only heart-warming he had got some cupfuls of wine;
Being not old yet, why was he this much lazy
Only to contemplate that home on the hillside so fine.

Since with friends I have had no close relations rife,
Why do I worry about receptions and good-byes in vain?
That is all, let me say a few more thanks to this life
Which has offered me this inn to shelter from the rain.

Translation by THANH-THANH

SELF-PORTRAIT

*Original “Chân Dung Tự Họa”
by VI KHUÊ*

I open both my feminine arms
to embrace this life full of fire and sword;
I have lived like what reptilians afford
with a couple of pupils and the clinging feet;
I have stuck obstinately to this earth so sweet;
I have clung to it like a snake or centipede,
then I get away from you and all in deed.
On my death please sing the mourning hymn
to cry and regret me just as you did Him...

Grieve for me because I have wept,
I have shed an ocean of pearl tears well kept,
for I am by birth a compassionate artist...
I am today nothing at all and at least.
I am already as old a creature as a stunted tree,
with sharp-nailed hands to shade the sun free,
with a wrinkled face like a wild owl
or a she-cat each night wandering to scowl
in the blind alleys to repeatedly lament...

I have refused, for living equal to trees a bent,
to fall into decay; I have become a weed
contributing my two hands to sinful deed
in the life where I have vowed love.
I, with a lot of compassion of a dove
have taken part in the battle daring not ask.
Question for me, please question for me, unmask!
Grieve for me, please cry and regret Her...

Translation by THANH-THANH

THANK YOU, MY CREATOR!

*Original “Cám Ơn Tạo Hóa”
by VI KHUÊ*

Thank you, my Creator, for creating me
with a personal nature that never wanes.
Although born empty-handed in life to be
my private property intact a bloc remains.

I know my trip to moor at which quays;
My hands, my brain, and my nerves
are neither the same as plants and trees
nor as anyone else that formally serves.

I was not born as a mere drop of water
that was cast long or short unable to flee
as a small uniformed soldier in his quarter
with no roots nor tops to blend in the sea.

Nature created me so original there:
My personality to grow to my mind's reach.
Let me refuse any uniform to wear,
Grow up and wise to fit my height and width.

Translation by THANH-THANH

TWO COUNTRIES

Original “Hai Quê”
by VÕ ĐÌNH TIỀN

Amazingly, my country has become twofold:
One when I was born and one when I grow old.
Back over the ocean, there was the monsoon
Fresh and fragrant during each sultry noon;
While here, heaven and earth covered with snow
White freezing all the winter has to undergo.
In my innermost I cannot feel relief;
Emotion and memory digs deeper the source of grief.

That is where I came into being from surd,
Enjoyed Mom’s lullabies, lisped Dad my first word;
Where I had suffered much humiliation,
Overcame many obstacles to reach this destination.

Now that I have resettled in this place
To experience torment counting days pass apace;
Here at old age trying to babble halfway
Each syllable difficult to read, each word hard to say;
Using motor cars for even each short distance
But still uncomfortable with convenient assistance.

Awake, homesickness and expectations boil;
Sleeping, dreams attach to the native soil.
Is it right? that I have got two ways,
And my thought also between two directions sways.

When will there be? a whirligig of time
For the two streams to join in chime:
A place of birth there and a place of refuge here,
I have to accept having two countries equally dear.

Translation by THANH-THANH

WISHES

*Original “Muốn”
by VÕ ĐÌNH TIÊN*

I only wish
You were a flower:
I pin you on my pocket, close to my heart,
To cherish your fragrance; above all you tower.

I only wish
You were dew:
On my long road, in unfavorable weather,
I am wet with frost; I bathe in you.

I only wish
You were a bird:
I take with me the little pretty pet
To have your sweet love songs always heard.

I only wish
You were the muse:
I adore the masterpieces,
Passion for you into all my youth to infuse.

But, darling, I am so afraid! If you were
A flower: crowds would feast their eyes upon you!
Frost: folks would venture into wind and dew!
A bird: spreading your wings, high sky to recover,
You would fly off and quit this lover!

Poetry: you are the outstanding verse,
I am not able to broider with words too terse,
Although I dote on you with all my heart!
And thus, I yield to your trend. Do your part!
My joys of life on you depend...

Translation by THANH-THANH

SOME MORROW I WILL RETURN

*Original “Mai Ta Về”
by VÕ THẠNH VẤN*

Some morrow, I will go back to that familiar hamlet;
But are still there those who did see me leave?
The old people these days have been without any news,
Do they understand just about missing them I grieve?

Some morrow, I will get back to that beloved road
Where the rainy wind rocked lampshades on the wall.
The evening path, the night alley, those dreamy dates...
Who knows if until now she has kept tears yet to fall.

Some morrow, I will make to that ancient street
With daisy to bloom in the sun, and kids to drool:
My Mom attended to me in the flamboyant gorgeous,
School-children seen off and picked up after school.

Some morrow, I will return to that antique district
To recall silhouettes of pitiable elders in poor situation
In the dark shadow of a late and lean harvest,
Unaware their plight slacks off my poetic inspiration.

Some morrow, I will fly back to that old township
To discuss our vow to restore our dear fatherland,
Night after night without sleep, assemble, congregate,
Determined to end the evil, but firstly united we stand.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THANK YOU, MOTHER!

To American adoptive mothers who heartily
fostered children of Vietnamese origin

Original "Tạ Ôn Mẹ"
by VŨ ĐÌNH TRƯỜNG

Thank you, my white-skinned golden-haired mother
Who are not of the same bloodline as me or the other
But you fished me out of the abyss a refugee errant,
Adopted and fostered me with the love of a parent.

Thank you for having taken such painstaking jobs
Days after days in warehouses and workshops,
Toiled and moiled extra hours to make me undeterred,
And stayed up late to teach me each English word.

Pushing language difference as a bad barrier aside,
You soothed me with your look warm and arms wide.
You are an Westerner and I an Easterner, how rare,
I was such a heavy debt, you volunteered to bear!

You knew well that I came from that unhappy land
Where there were many a ferocious and fiendish band
Who invaded the South and confined people to cages,
Brought the whole nation back to the Middle Ages.

Since then I had become a nestless nestling in qualm
In childhood to leave Dad and separate from Mom,
I got into the fleeing boat with hot tears dripping wet
Risking my life entrusted to wave crests full of threat.

Thanks to your high-sky and vast-ocean love, my fay,
That I could survive until I can achieve success today
And become a dignified human in this second home,
A pride for both our peoples under the azure dome.

You are so shining in my soul the glittering torchlight
To enlighten each of my steps scintillating in the night.
Your virtuous advice I will always remember of course:
“Be American but don’t forget your Vietnamese source!”

I respectfully offer you this fresh gorgeous bright rose
Suffused with my affection in each red petal to enclose.
On my repatriation kneeling to kiss my native soil soon
I will bear in mind thousandfold your precious boon.

Translation by THANH-THANH

HALF-AND-HALF

*Original “Nửa”
by VŨ HỒI*

I have lived a life half-sober and half-tight;
Half-black, half-white; and half-day, half-night;
Half in full happiness, half in forlorn hope;
Mid-stream sand hillock; steep mount mid-slope;
Half loving passionately, half missing depressed;
Half smiling affectionately, half weary distressed;

Half-soul in the ephemeral world composition;
Mid-itinerary tottering in this human condition;
In the flickering glow dozing a late half-sleep;
Drunk-laughing by the oil lamp at midnight deep.

Translation by THANH-THANH

THE WINDY SKY

*Original “Khung Trời Lộng Gió”
by VU HÔI*

Let me paint all in this picture, the windy sky,
The leaven of love that once ascended the throne high.
I caringly caress while drawing the spray of benignity;
Smiles like flowers on lips keep blooming in dignity.

My affection for the Muse, for the moving space,
Ten buds of painstaking fingers melodiously interlace,
As if toasting in a drinking bout, what friendship tender!
Even on one occasion, how it seems forever to gender!

I have come here in the North-East penetrating cold
To miss each drop of yellow dry sun in my country old,
With modest luggage, the memory of that evening party
Suffused with nostalgia I send to you wrapped, hearty.

I paint the picture of my lover in the windy firmament,
And myself to sit here to count my solitude permanent,
The wild bird upon a time straying from life's feast,
Darling! Let me confide to you this fervid twilight yeast.

Translation by THANH-THANH

OUR PEOPLE'S PANGS OF PAIN

Original "Niềm Đau Dân Tộc"
by *VŨ THỊ SÀI GÒN*

My children asked why I grew Asian vegetables and
fruit-trees
But not apples or mulberries as one almost everywhere
sees.

Why, Dad, did you do so?
Hearing that, I smiled and pondered over that though
For a while then to the kids I tried to explain:
Oh my dear! when you grow up you will gain
The knowledge and understanding of the expatriates'
mood

Now living here but over the past not ceasing to brood,
Weighed down with nostalgia, recalling the rural road
pathway
On which they once went to school twice each day;
Banana leaves swaying as if twittering birds happy to
greet;
During hard work the deliciously sweet coconut milk
and meat
Eating and drinking one's fill, how satiated with
pleasure!

Small-seeded sugary longans in the garden, at leisure,
The calabash trellis shading the scorching summer sun
at noon
Drowsing in the bamboo hammock, what boon!
The lulling refrain of traditional songs, the melodious
croon...

My garden is indeed a half of our fatherland here nigh,
While the other half still is beyond the longing sky!
Oh Dad! when would you lead us back to our old soil
to visit
Our beloved country as beautiful as a poem exquisite,
Nam Quan Pass: where, since when have we been
possessors
There our ancestors victoriously defeated Chinese
aggressors
So that they bitterly uttered this historical phrase:
Nam Quan Pass, one out of ten, it is to blaze
That crossing the frontier to trespass on Viet territorial
side
Only one out of ten invaders could retreat alive!
We will get there taking our ancestors' oath to continue
To preserve our sacred bequeathed land as a new sinew,
And visit Ban Gioc Waterfall so dreamy and dear
So charming that one cannot find in the States here.
We remember when you lulled our younger sibling to
sleep
The long poem but only one section in mind we
forever keep:

There, in Dong Dang, are Ky Lua Street, To Thi Statue,
 Tam Thanh Temple – Then, who left for Pho Lang
 with you?

How much to regret her parents' pain
 Of birth and breeding, resigned to be fain.

Hearing my children's words, deep grief in my heart
 spears

I swiftly turned away to conceal the humiliated tears
 Writhing my heart, overflowing like flood,
 I feel I nearly vomit blood.

There is no longer that cherished border area of our
 land:

The red slaves have betrayed their country—What brand!
 We will return to punish ye,
 Heaven does not tolerate, earth does not forgive, ye
 can't flee!

The whole Viet people will rise up thundering in a
 storm

To make a clean sweep of communist rubbish in every
 form

Off our four-thousand-years-old precious native nation,
 And reclaim the sacred soil that is our forefathers'
 foundation.

We are not afraid of bloodshed, in order to gain
 A beautiful Vietnam, inviolate and unified domain to
 remain

From Nam Quan Pass through Ca Mau Cape.

The Viet nationals will return to rebuild, reconstruct,
reshape
Even from all corners of the world, earnest and clever
A gemmed Vietnam, strong and prosperous for ever,
Truly peaceful, free, and humane.
On that national festival in a boisterous brouhaha so
plain
We will bring back and present to our relatives at home
The Viet longans from the seeds we took abroad as
gnome
And sowed on the Free World's ground, sprinkled
thorough
Although with water from Seine River or the
Hillsborough,
They are still sweet, fragrant like sugar, honey – What
grace!
In spite of autumn wind and winter rain in our native
place,
We still will hold each other's hands, hand in hand
And travel throughout our treasured fatherland
To sing, to laugh, to long, and to love.

Translation by THANH-THANH

IT RAINS ON THE OLD RIVERSIDE

*Original “Mưa Bên Bờ Sông Cũ”
by VŨ THỊ THIÊN THU*

The river has turned cold, the mist having lifted,
Its current gets immersed in torrents coming from afar.
Rain is jubilantly blossoming between sky and earth,
Drop following drop, the Galaxy rises star after star.

Which drops would fall on which head-waters?
Which drops would soak old rosy cheeks with verve?
Which drops would land on whose shy hair?
Which drops would attach to what eyelashes' curve?

Thousands of flowers spread over the stream,
The waves embrace the images of reflected clouds.
The pour agitates the face of the watercourse,
Hazy becomes the smog, shattered grow the sounds.

Translation by THANH-THANH

GRANT ME A SMILE

Original "Xin Một Nụ Cười"
by YÊN BÌNH

Unable to see you for just one day
Suffices to lade my heart with sorrow.
I had lived a rubbish life for many years,
Until one day: much grief for the morrow.

You came into my existence as a gale
For far-off melancholy to surge.
I had already forgotten my karma;
You had the heart me to fancy you to urge!

Which dreamers don't later wake up?
I have felt anguish from now on rise high.
You arrived then you left, I knew it; but
Why I got infatuated with this fleeting tie!

I will content myself with life's vision
Although in a twinkling I consent to.
You break off, I will go into eternity;
A short moment is enough to love you.

Let me come to see you this evening!
And please grant me a smile, however!
I will embrace into my sleep my dearest
Whom I will still cherish forever...

Translation by THANH-THANH

IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER

*Original “Tưởng Nhớ Cha”
by YÊN SƠN*

Whilst boarding the aircraft to fly towards the ocean
I suddenly pitied my father, tears flowing out of
emotion.

When that April national calamity forced me to flee
I left our country piloting my plane to the sea.

Parted from parents because of the bloodshed,
So many years in high wind and heavy rain overhead
And finally came flooded with distress one day
I did not know it was the last goodbye for ever to say!

Oh, dear Dad, how could I know, on your part
You wished each drop of blood to return to your heart.
So many years you had desperately inquired after me
Anxiously fearing a “killed in action” notice to see.

Oh, dear Dad! I shall never forget that bad day
I learned the sad news that you had passed away:
I became numb with grief, tears unable to flow;
I wanted to cry but burst out laughing madly in woe.

For eighteen years afterwards, I have not once returned
And have neither fulfilled citizen obligations so
yearned.

In this foreign land how I feel an unsuitable location:
Days after days only to think of means of sustenance.

Oh, dear Dad! an innermost storm has arisen; it boils;
Your precious admonition has since spun into coils
To tie tightly around my heart, imprint in my mind,
So that times I compress my lips blood to ooze to bind.

“The country is in ruins! To strive to be a worthy man
You must try to become useful thru your life’s span!
Hold your head up, my son! to be a Viet youth, an heir
To our ancestors’ heroic examples that are still there!”

Oh, dear Dad! I have always pondered on my concern
About living in exile while nurturing the hope of return.
But days have passed and months elapsed, shameful,
My hair has turned grey but the ocean is still vast.

Like a tree for a quarter of a century uprooted already
Now replanted in a foreign region, how hard to steady!
Having a homeland but not having a space
For me to get back to find a sheltering place!

I boarded the plane to head towards the waves
To go to Atlanta but felt as to Vung Tau that craves...
I was staggered and tried to restrain my pain
For fear of bursting into tears mixed with blood stain.

Translation by THANH-THANH

NEW “HỒ TRƯỜNG”

*Original “Tân Hồ Trường”
by YÊN SƠN*

Just then... some thirty-three a year
 I look back on those green times dear
 Since “nineteen seventy five”
 Time has passed so fast into the past to dive
 When it seemed in a flowery summer night dream to
 hive.
 Contemplating myself in the mirror, how strange:
 Gray hair, sunken cheeks, wrinkled skin – what
 change!
 Suddenly in my heart many anxieties rise up
 My innards contract in a bitter cup
 When my country’s image glimmers in sight
 Tears ready to overflow in such sad plight.
 How intimate it was the “thee-and-thou”
 How lovable our karma once to be soldiers under a
 vow,

But now everything has turned to eternally flee
I alone in this place am still remembering all ye
Mostly on this year's commemoration
The landmark of time – thirty three years of
botheration
Still reminisce about each bird that swiftly took wing
Leaving behind country and even families, just flying.
I feel pity for myself this cuss
I take compassion on ourselves, all of us
But do not grudge being born in this century as wrong.
I now have lived peacefully in the States so long
Seeing the sun set I regret my youth at twilight.

Oh friends! thou and thee
Tonight...
I again remember ye
The old buddies who have once faced dangers with me.
I've felt full of rancor in exile full of tears
But this life gradually dries up every time April nears
Tonight suddenly is abundant the wine
Outside it is pitch-black along the skyline
Though late, drinking alone, this vigil I am to keep
Reciting the Ho Truong poem in a singsong voice deep
Holding the bottle to the four directions stretching out
I still do not know where to pour for a drinking bout
Where is my each close chum
More than thirty years dumb!

Only in a foreign country can I find out the truth, my stand
“Each human being has only one fatherland”
As for us, how come?

Buried under the cold ground was the fate of some,
Drowned in the deep sea, that of others;
A few scattered at the ends of the earth, in smothers.
Whatever their lives, their wish nobody can ever foil,
They never forget and abandon their ancestors’ native
soil.

Sometimes someone said that we are old-aged already
So I tried to address ye as “you” solemn and steady
But my voice I still thought it some other’s lisp anyhow
And guffawed ... pitying the “thee-and-thou”
Ho Truong wine, if ye still think of me and us
henceforth
Please raise your cups even in East, West, South, North
Though we are like an oil-lamp burning out its last fire
May it be a minute of brilliance before the time we
expire.

Translation by THANH-THANH

YOUTHS! THE SACRED MOMENT HAS COME!

Youths! Our national sacred spirit is expecting us all
The whole people are counting on us each hour withal⁽¹⁾
Original "Thanh Niên Oi! Giờ Thiêng Đã Đến"
by YÊN SƠN

Wael Ghonim⁽²⁾ solemnly stated his decision to steady:
"To die for democracy and liberty, I am ready!"
The peoples of Tunisia, Egypt together shouted in
bliss:
"Abolish dictatorship, one-party government,
injustice!"

Vietnamese youths! you brothers, and you sisters,
Why waiting, not to courageously rise up like twisters?
Study well the struggling against the communist mar,
Those precious lessons in the dissolution of the USSR.

The Berlin Wall only in one night collapsed;
By demonstrators after one month Ben Ali fled the
traps;
Egypt revolted and a glorious victory could achieve
Over Mubarack just after eighteen days to upheave.

The Jasmine Revolution succeeded itself to fulfill:
What tyrannical powers survive the people's will?
Dear youths, do not look down your origin to forget,
Our motherland has called you speechlessly in fret.

Have you seen, huh, how many igloos of dynamite
Right below the bed of the brutal system, the blight:
"Robbery, misappropriation, murder in cold blood,
Landmarks, islands, Central Plateau Bauxite! Dud!

Woodland let out, territorial areas yielded to Chinese
That corner Vietnamese economy, servility to please.
Cadres, authorities' infinite dishonesty and greed,
Millions of poor folks' deficiency in minimum need."

Our ancestors' examples are radiant, courageous, stout;
Dear youths! Our sacred moment has come to start out!
Let us unanimously unite efforts to save our native land
Like previous Yen Bay youths, aggressors to withstand.

Translation by THANH-THANH

⁽¹⁾ *From the song "Health for Country"*

⁽²⁾ *Wael Ghonim is a young engineer who started the struggle for Liberty and Democracy in Cairo, Egypt.*

